MENDE AND MISSIONARY:

BELIEF, PERCEPTION AND ENTERPRISE IN SIERRA LEONE

by

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D E D I C A T I O N : A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

To the Members of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, past and present, who have served in the Mission of Sierra Leone, this study is respectfully dedicated.

Thanks are due to many people for their help and criticism, particularly to Professor James Littlejohn and Dr. Roy Willis of the Department of Social Anthropology in the University of Edinburgh, who acted as Supervisors.

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A B S T R A C T

Focused on the Mende of Sierra Leone and the Catholic Missionary Congregation of the Holy Spirit, this study examines the impact of a proselytizing world-religion on a West African people, over the past hundred years.

After summarizing Catholic Missionary history in West Africa, the idea of a missionary myth-making process - whereby the missionary is incorporated into a religious institution, sustained and made resilient in the face of challenges - is introduced, (Chapter One). Historical and geographical data concerning the Mende, are presented in Chapter Two.

The subsequent analysis falls into two interdependent parts. Chapters Three to Five propose a model to formalize Mende belief and thought, the key concepts of spirits (ngafanga) and power (halei), and the nature and articulation of so-called Secret Societies. The indigenous religious system, in a broad sense, is analyzed with a view to assessing its potential compatibility with Catholicism. Chapters Seven to Nine trace, on a chronological and epochal base, Catholic Missionary enterprise in Mende country, considering development of policy and its influence both on the Mende and on the missionaries themselves. The Mission as an agent of social change and the capacity of the 'missionary myth' to sustain and motivate individual and group, are further considerations.

Chapter Six addresses the issue of 'world-view', attempting to characterize collective representations of Mende and Missionary, and to determine the rationale and assumptions informing the attitudes and beliefs of both in relation to the world and to each other.

Finally, Chapter Ten draws together the threads of the argument and various lines of enquiry, superimposing the model of missionary religion and endeavour, on that attributed to the Mende, and gauging the congruence between the two. And by reference to earlier Chapters, further explanation and hypotheses germane to contemporary circumstances in Mende country, are proposed.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER:

GENERAL AIMS AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY

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In certain respects the Mende of Sierra Leone[1] are well represented in the anthropological literature;[2] missionaries however, are not.[2] Yet missionary work among the Mende over several generations, may be expected to have encountered, created and dealt with some problems of sociological interest, the study of which would be of some relevance to social anthropology. Christian missionaries are clearly agents of socio-religious change, and any study of contemporary social and religious forms in Sierra Leone cannot overlook a consideration of any contribution Christianity and its missionaries might have made, granted the history of missionary endeavour in that country.

The present work focuses on the contact between a Catholic Missionary organization and the Mende people, looking also at the effect of such contact on both groups. To complete such a study, an analysis of certain aspects of Mende belief and thought was not sufficient without integration with an account of the social and religious organization of the missionaries.

The particular missionary group concerned here is the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, whose members have worked in Sierra Leone since 1864, and we shall enquire what convictions they share

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[1] Confer Bibliography, at the end of Chapter Ten.

[2] Beidelman, T. (1974) pp.235f.

and how they are trained and prepared for Africa; why they work in Africa and what they hope to accomplish. We shall look at policies and their implementation, and not only at the missionaries' assessment of their work, but at the Mende understanding of the identity, aims and methods of the missionaries. We shall look at missionary - and Mende - evaluations of missionary achievement and Mende reaction. And overall we shall attempt to assess how Mende social and religious patterns of belief and behaviour have reacted to the presence and the message of the missionaries.

It will be necessary to ask about the position and status of the missionary as a "marginal Mende" - living and working for many years as an expatriate among Mende people: and of the Christian Mende, himself a "marginal Mende" insofar as he has to some degree departed from the traditional way of life of his forebears.

I think it can be shown that contact between missionary and Mende has led to more unexpected and sometimes traumatic changes in the missionaries' self-image and sense of purpose, than has been the case for a great proportion of Mende people - a somewhat unexpected conclusion, for reasons which will become clear. And I shall consider the extent to which missionary enterprise and hopes have been rewarded with the kind of results expected, adducing sociological explanations where possible.

To document such assertions and relate them to sociological theory, it is necessary to paint a fairly wide canvas, trying to characterize the genius of the Mende people and their traditional cosmological notions, including informalized ideas of the supreme being, spirits, and metaphysical power.[1] Further, the character and influence of the institutions known as "Secret Societies", will be discussed, as well as their reaction to the missionary presence. Missionary knowledge of the local vernacular and the social organization of the Mende, needs to be assessed, in relation to missionary policies. Mende appreciation of such policies as evangelically-based, or merely prescriptive or proscriptive measures, must be gauged if we are to interpret Mende reaction.

In the context of a discussion and explication of the "World View" of the Mende, the present work will seek to show that the changes undergone by the Mende - religious changes particularly, but also social ones - and the particular forms which religious change has taken, are by no means due exclusively to missionary activity, but were significantly shaped by the prevailing ethos in Mende country, during and also long before the time when Christian missionaries were present. Thus, a sociological assessment of the effects of missionary work among the Mende, must take cognizance of

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[1] See Chapter Four, infra.

the prevailing social, ecological and religious climate, as well as of the evangelical works of the missionaries themselves.

Such then, are some of the main lines of enquiry to be pursued in the following chapters.

One final idea to be considered is that of a missionary myth-making process: in other words I intend to show that it is helpful to look at the set of ideas a missionary holds in common with his fellows, and which legitimate his presence and behaviour, and determine his reaction to eventualities relating to his work. The term "missionary myth" is a heuristic device or tag, intended to characterize the beliefs and assumptions, their maintenance and sometimes contradictory nature, which missionaries shared. A much fuller illustration of this idea, and the importance of the missionary myth in sustaining and encouraging missionaries in time of hardship, as well as in assuring them of the certainty of their ultimate reward, will be provided through the text: and the development of and changes in the missionary myth, will be charted and analyzed.

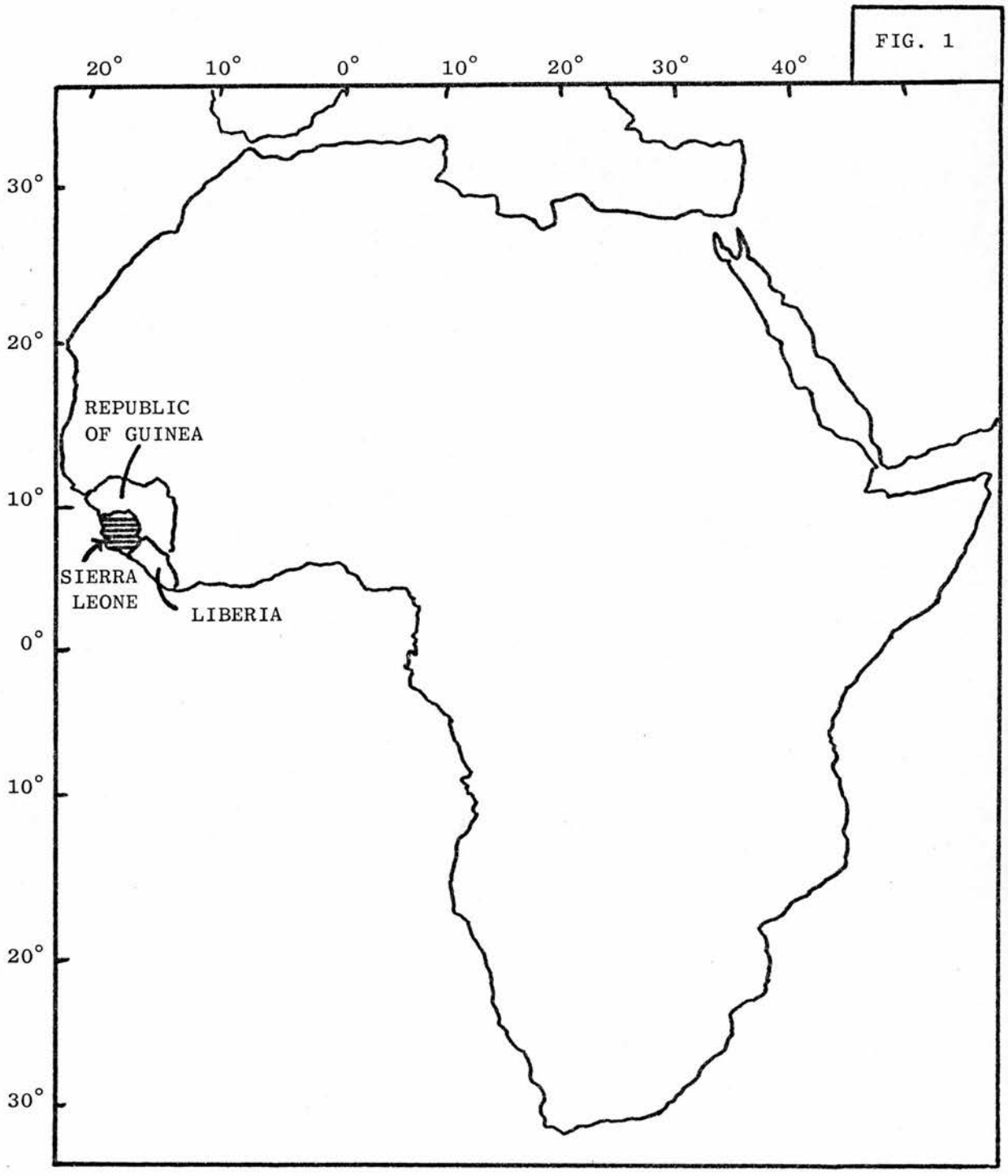
Apart from published works on the Mende and on the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, its Founder, purpose and history, unpublished diaries as well as Mission Journals and documents housed in various mission stations were collected or perused. Most of the main mission stations were visited, but the bulk of the research was carried out in rural Mende country, particularly in Komboya and adjacent Badjia Chiefdoms in upper Kpa-Mende country, north-east of Bo, the capital of the Southern Province. [Fig. 2, p.7.]

Komboya Chiefdom, with a population in 1962 of 6,200 people, has fifty-six villages scattered over an area of 110 square miles. The Chiefdom town, Njala Komboya was established as a Catholic mission "outstation" from Gerihun in 1935 with a Primary school, and by 1975 had a Secondary school of 109 pupils, a permanent mission residence with a resident Catholic priest, a government dispensary, and five expatriate teachers. The nearest large town is Bo, a distance of 36 miles, to which a daily lorry service runs. The people are predominantly rice-farmers and there is practically no mechanization of any kind; no running water, surfaced roads, or electricity. In this environment, traditional social organization may be studied directly or can be reconstructed with some fidelity to the original. Religious forms and beliefs can be studied at first hand or through informants old enough to remember pre-mission days.

In contrast to this isolated rural area, there are longer-established missions in other townships, and for comparative data the missions and surrounding villages of Bonthe, Moyamba, Serabu and Gerihun were visited. These missions were founded between 1891 and 1905, and with Freetown, Blama and Pujehun, are the oldest Catholic missions in the country.

From a period of study in these areas, but particularly in Komboya Chiefdom, in two field trips - November 1972 to June 1973, and January 1974 to June 1975 - the data for the following study were gathered.

SIERRA LEONE IN AFRICA



PROVINCIAL BOUNDARIES, CATHOLIC MISSIONS AND KOMBOYA CHIEFDOM IN SIERRA LEONE

FIG. 2

CHAPTER ONE:

CATHOLIC MISSIONS AND THE WEST COAST OF AFRICA

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1-1 INTRODUCTION

In examining the influence of a World religion on the Mende of Sierra Leone, one is striving towards a single goal by a variety of means, and must undertake an exposition of both Mende and Missionary belief and thought. By maintaining an ideological distance from the objects of study through a disinterested and non-ethnocentric approach, an attempt will be made to characterize attitudes dispassionately: but at the same time, Mende and Missionary ideas about themselves and each other must be integrated into the completed analysis. Thus, in the following pages it should be understood that one is talking of Mende or Missionary apprehensions of the world, individual or collective.

Beneath people's explanations and justifications lies the bedrock of historical fact. In the next chapter a summary of the history of the Mende people will be provided in order to establish certain general points of information as a necessary background to the subsequent chapters: and in this chapter some information and local history is offered as relevant to an understanding of missionaries and the development of missions in the Catholic Church. A grand history is neither possible nor

desirable here, but without some historical data, later ethnographic detail would suffer some decontextualization and distortion.

1-2 CATHOLIC MISSIONS

For simplicity, we distinguish four major phases in the history of the missionary movement, which is itself derived from both biblical and historical sources, but mainly from an acceptance of the injunction: "Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father . . . "[1]

Prior to the fall of the Roman Empire in the West (476 a.d.), Christianity evolved a method of evangelization which consisted of directing attention first to Jews and then to Gentiles: to the former the approach was Scriptural and Prophetic; to the latter, Philosophical and Charismatic. Centres of instruction were established in the cities, after which consolidation and expansion were undertaken.[2] This was a constant pattern of the era incorporating all Christians as missionaries; only very late were distinct missionary movements to appear, organized by local and regional Churches.[3] Thus was Christianity implanted throughout and beyond the Roman Empire, with expansion particularly noticeable after the accession of Constantine, when Egypt and

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[1] cf. Mt.XXIV.14; XXVIII.19-20: Mk.XVI.15: Lk.XXIV.47: Acts 1.8-9: Rom. 1.1-7, etc. For early itinerant missionaries, cf. Danielou, J. (1964) I;pp.25-28.

[2] For the early history of the expansion of Christianity see Lebreton, J. and Zeiller, J. (1946-) I.p.169 and Passim. Kleist, J.A. (1948) XI.3. Neill, S. (1964) Chts.1 and 2. Eusebius (1965).

[3] Chadwick, H. (1967) pp.43-53.

Proconsular Africa were evangelized, followed by Nubia and Ethiopia in the fourth and fifth centuries.[1]

Between the sixth and the tenth centuries, Western Monasticism, from the impetus provided by Pope Gregory the Great, developed as a highly efficient missionary institution. Under the aegis of successive Popes and with widespread support from Kings, methods adopted in the early Church were refined and the monastic missions contributed to the temporal as well as the spiritual welfare of the people evangelized. The monastery was the basic apostolic unit which became a real central mission: within its walls the monk-missionary prayed; from it he went forth to teach the heathen and to found Churches and parishes; to it he returned to repair his spiritual forces. Monastic missionary efforts in foreign countries were supported by the home-based missionary movement, and the avowed aim was not simply the rapid evangelization of peoples, but the support of the nascent Churches.[2] The part played by the monks in the formation of medieval Europe is incontrovertible.

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[1] Weiss, J. (1959) II.pp.655-703. Jedin, H. (1964-70). Hughes, P. (1934) I.p.152.

[2] Butler, C. (1919), pp.313-331. Knowles, D. (1969a): (1969b) II.Ch.9.15.

The third phase[1] can be seen during the period of geographical discovery and later ecclesiastical reform, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. This phase is characterized by a quartet of important events; the creation of Royal patronage - patronato réal[2] - which provided for royal jurisdiction over the Church in newly-discovered and colonized lands pertaining to Spain and Portugal; the foundation of the Jesuits in the aftermath of the Reformation; the establishment of the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith in 1622;[3] and the emergence of the Protestant Missionary Societies.

The itinerant Friars of the late Middle-ages were faced in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries with a new challenge, the world being discovered by Portuguese seamen and others. With the Jesuits, they evangelized the coast of Africa (including Sierra Leone in the seventeenth century). To

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[1] For developments between the end of the first millenium and the fifteenth century, see: Ullman, W. (1955) and Mollat, G. (1963) for the Papacy; Latourette, K.S. (1940) and Delacroix, S. (1956), for Christian Missions; and Pelican History of the Church (1967-9); Willistan Walker, W. (1970), and Fliche et Martin (1946-) Vols.14-17.

[2] Through the voyages of discovery the Church became aware of peoples who had never heard of Christ. The Treaty of Tordesillas had ratified the claims of Spain and Portugal to new lands. The rights and privileges of the Kings of these countries were finally defined in a Papal Brief, 'Universalis Ecclesiae'(1598) - these were political, commercial and religious, and on condition of active missionary work. This is what is known as 'Patronato'. cf. De Vaulx (1961) pp.65-66. Neill, S. (1964) pp.140-2

[3] This Congregation, sometimes referred to simply as 'Propaganda', filled the need for a central Pontifical Organization for the missions. The first Secretary, Monsignor Ingoli, published three reports crystallizing the New Policy. Missionary recruits must be more carefully chosen and include as many seculars (not members of Religious Orders) as possible, from among whom the Bishops should preferably be chosen; native customs must be respected; and native clergy encouraged.

the ranks of Francis Xavier and Roberto de Nobili in India, and Mateo Ricci in China, must be added Baltesar Barreira and Seraphin de Léon in Sierra Leone, for all belong to this same era of great missionary expansion.

The new cultures which the missionaries contacted presented a major problem. The disgust evinced by missionaries in South America at local practices, led ultimately to the policy known as the 'Clean Sweep' [1] - the destruction of the old civilization and its replacement by European Christianity. More percipient Jesuits in the East were to become involved in the notorious Chinese Rites Controversy.[2] The missionary method which developed throughout these three centuries was Catechetical rather than Sacramental so that significant instruction and catechesis preceded Baptism, but the Eucharist was only rarely - and then often grudgingly - given: in some areas indigenous peoples were excluded from Holy Orders;[3] and the Sacrament of Extreme Unction does not seem to have been widely conferred.[4]

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1 This policy was confirmed after the theological study of religion in Mexico by Bernard de Sahagun and promoted in Brazil by the Jesuits. cf. De Vaulx (1961) p.74.

2 Dunne, G. (1962) pp.229-30; 295-301.

3 With the exception of the Philippines (De Vaulx, op.cit. p.73; but see also Neill, S. (op.cit. p.175).

4 "It was common practice to administer the Sacraments of Baptism, Penance and Matrimony" (De Vaulx, op.cit. p.68; Neill, op.cit. p.173). A fairly large number were admitted to Confirmation, a smaller number to Extreme Unction, and grave doubts were expressed with regard to admission to the Eucharist. "In many areas the custom grew of admitting the most regular of the faithful to Communion [only] once a year, at Easter" (Neill, op.cit.). Brazil was an exception - "The faithful were admitted to all the Sacraments, although Holy Communion was not given without strict preparation" (De Vaulx, op.cit. p.75).

Apart from the lack of Sacramental emphasis, the European model of Christianity was transplanted to the newly discovered lands and a practice was followed, in Sierra Leone as well as in South America, of trying to establish Christian villages in order to give the converts a deeply-rooted Christian life, to protect them from exploitation, and imbue them with a sense of self-government.

The final phase of the missionary movement, with which we deal more directly in this study, really begins in the nineteenth century after its previous decline in the eighteenth, due to: anti-clericalism; politico-religious rivalry between Spain, Portugal, and Propaganda; rivalries among many missionary Societies; the suppression of the Jesuits; the Slave Trade, and the French Revolution.

European peace and the Colonisation of the nineteenth century, as well as "the religious awakening which affected not only the Catholic Church but almost every Christian Denomination in every country in the West",[1] contributed to the revival of missionary interest. The major thrust of missions now was in the direction of the Pacific Islands and Africa, and it was different in character from previous enterprises. Essentially, the nineteenth century missions were direct missions to the indigenous peoples, aimed at reaching all peoples by every means available, spiritual and temporal, whether through schools,

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[1] Neill, S. (1964), p.250.

hospitals, dispensaries, agricultural or trade schools and projects. Everywhere an attempt was made to create an indigenous Church.[1] Failures there were, as in Tibet and Afghanistan, and perhaps, some thought, standards were too exacting; but the missionaries also tried to create local ecclesiastical structures from which an indigenous clergy would spring. The theory was actually realized in varying degrees in different places and from denomination to denomination, but in general the point can be made that there was still some over-insistence on the European model of Christianity - an insistence which belied official policy but which was deemed justifiable by missionaries in the field - and insufficient adaptation to local conditions and customs: such is the judgment of historians.

This final phase was marked too, by an increasing awareness of the real difficulties of native language-learning and use; the effects of isolation, sickness and the premature death of so many missionaries; government interference in some areas; and inter-denominational rivalries. Against this crude backdrop, certain images of Catholic missionary work in Sierra Leone, can be projected.

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[1] Previously, missionaries were Europeans only.

1-3 CATHOLIC MISSIONARIES IN SIERRA LEONE

1-3.1 The Order of Christ

The Military Ecclesiastical Order of Christ, founded in 1319 and vested with the properties of the suppressed Order of Knights Templar in Portugal, was in 1454 given spiritual jurisdiction over "all territories beyond Cape Bojador and Cape Nam and all Guinea as far as the Antarctic Seas."[1] But there is no reason to believe that missionary priests of the Order were active on the West Coasts of Africa[2] even though by 1460, when the Grand Master, Prince Henry the Navigator, died, his explorations had reached as far as what is now Sierra Leone. Whatever priests there were, functioned largely if not exclusively, as chaplains to other Europeans.[3]

1-3.2 Portuguese Jesuits

In 1518 Pope Leo X had, in the Brief, Exponi Nobis, encouraged the formation of indigenous clergy in West Africa, but apart from such Papal velleities, the first major action to be

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[1] Previous European presence in West Africa is dismissed as legend by de la Roncière (1934) p.25 and (1925) pp.10-13.

[2] Utting, (1934) p.43, asserts that the Order had a "religious house" at Kru Bay by the end of the fifteenth century; denied by Hamelberg (Mss; q.v.): and Latourette, K.S. (1940) III.p.38 says "In the initial stages of the Portuguese discoveries in the fifteenth century, the Order of Christ . . . was theoretically prominent, for Prince Henry the Navigator was its Grand Master. Beyond this, however, the military orders had no prominence in the conquests and missions of the new day. Missions and territorial conquest were often associated, but the function of the Missionary and the function of the soldier were now separated."

[3] All African volunteer clergy working in Africa were required to belong to the Order, but such priests were not primarily dedicated to missionizing through the evangelization of the black Africans. This distinction has been blurred by some historians. cf. Bane, M. (1956) op.cit. pp.18-19.

taken in respect of Sierra Leone, was not until 1533 when Pope Clement VII erected the diocese of Santiago da Cabo Verde under Bishop Blase Netto. Running from the river Gambia to Cape Palmas (fig. 3), the diocese included all islands within thirty leagues of the coast. Sierra Leone and the islands were now part of a recognized ecclesiastical jurisdiction, though there is no record of resident clergy until the opening years of the seventeenth century. In 1593 the Bishop of Santiago had returned from the Cape Verde Islands to Lisbon, never having visited mainland Africa. Three years later, King Philip of Spain and Portugal,[1] tried to recruit Jesuit missionaries for Santiago diocese. The Jesuits accepted, but in accordance with their policy, drawn up in 1585, opted to reside and operate, not in Santiago itself, but on the mainland. In 1605 three Portuguese Jesuits and a layman arrived in Sierra Leone.

The Superior, Father Baltesar (Balthasar) Barreira,[2] was sixty-seven, having spent thirteen years in Angola.[3] Referring, presumably, to the region somewhere between Santiago and Sierra Leone, he writes:

> "One of the greatest obstacles [to conversion], is that there are already in this region, Africans from other parts, who take upon themselves to spread the teaching of Mohammed."[4]

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[1] The Kingdoms were united in 1581.

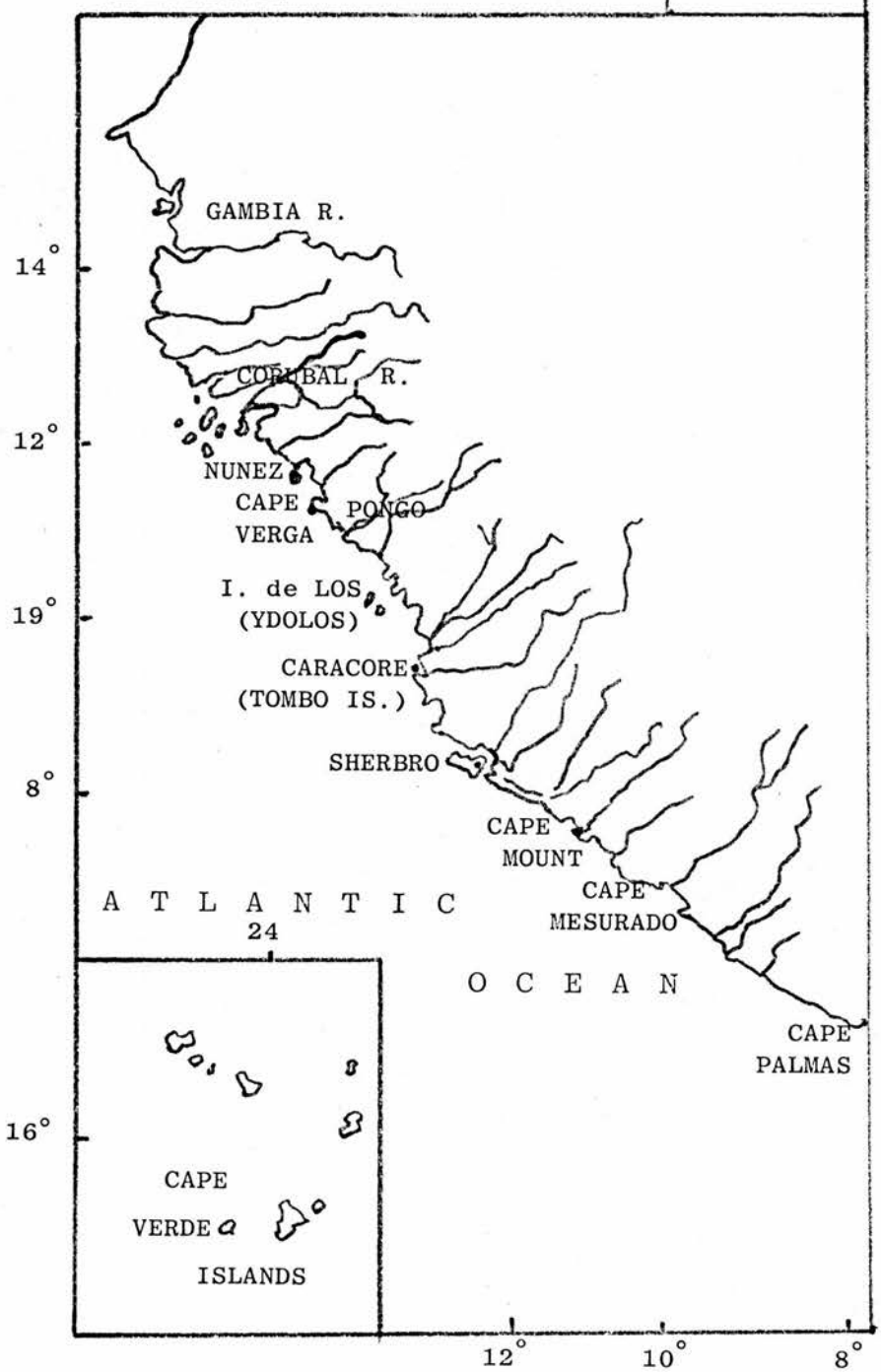
[2] cf. Kup, P. (1963) p.27.

[3] Bane, M. op.cit. p.76f gives an interesting but partly inaccurate account of the Jesuits. cf. Hamelberg, E. (1964).

[4] I am indebted to Rev. E. Hamelberg for his help and scholarly work on as yet untranslated Portuguese archives. He says the "Africans from other parts" would have been Mandingo from the Gambia.

DIOCESE OF SANTIAGO DA CABO VERDE (1533)

FIG. 3



Indeed, Barreira and later missionaries were to discover in Sierra Leone a fairly vigorous and proselytizing form of Islam.

Portuguese settlers[1] - perhaps even some latter-day members of the Order of Christ - were living in the vicinity, and Barreira found some signs of the Christian faith,[2] but his preoccupation was with the indigenous inhabitants whose King, Philip Leonis,[3] became not only a firm friend, but by all accounts an exemplary Christian. His was no mere baptism of convenience, nor was Barreira over-interested in statistics as an index of the success of his labours as a missionary. He seems to have possessed a striking empathy with the Africans and a determination to bring Christianity and not simply baptism to them. As he says:

> "Lest it appear to some that this ruler [Philip] came rather hastily to the decision of becoming a Christian . . . let me narrate how God used as an instrument of conversion the chief of his concubines who was already a Christian having been reared by Portuguese. When she learned of my arrival, reflecting on the state in which she lived, she resolved to set order to her life; and because she had much influence over the King, she took upon herself to enlighten him concerning the truth of our Holy Faith, and the great grace which God had deigned to grant him, by bringing me to his domains to instruct and baptize him. So well did she plead with him that, God's grace helping, the King came of his own accord to ask for baptism."

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1 Rodney, W. (1970) pp.75-5: Settlers were encouraged on the offshore islands, not on the mainland where they were simply private citizens with no right to protection.

2 Barreira writes (originally in Portuguese) - "Les prêtres qui étaient venus en ces quartiers n'y avaient jamais fait office de prêtre, ni même dit la Messe et ne s'occupaient à autre chose qu'à vendre et achêter."

3 Barreira said Mass "dans une église construite par le roi, qui par la suite fut baptisé avec le nom de Philip" (Hamelberg, loc.cit.) Rodney, W. (1970) p.52.

4 Hamelberg, E. op.cit. pp.3-4.

But Barreira did not immediately accede to the King's request: rather he instructed him, along with a number of his family. Impressed with the new life-style of Philip, King Tora from the north bank of the Sierra Leone river, though a centenarian, followed suit, and retained as his single spouse, Philip's sister.

Barreira appears as quite a character; saintly and sane, percipient and practical, he strove to establish a strong base for the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone and beyond,[1] building on the good faith and good intentions of the Portuguese settlers who were friendly towards the local rulers, and instructing them and their families. An important point, noticeable here, is that Barreira was combining catechesis and sacramental initiation, and that as the area of his influence extended, it became increasingly difficult for Barreira who, within a month of his arrival, was the only surviving priest[2] and minister of the Sacraments.

At the request of the King of Bena,[3] Barreira set out for Susu country to the North, preached to an enthusiastic crowd, but was upstaged by one of the King's minstrels who spoke in the local vernacular. Barreira said Mass for seven Christians, presumably the Portuguese traders in the area. The King was not permitted to observe the Mass itself, in conformity with the old Catholic custom that only baptized Christians could attend the

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[1] The Susu King of Bena sent a message to Barreira, requesting baptism. (Hamelberg, E. op.cit. p.5.)

[2] Father de Barros having died in October 1605 in Santiago.

[3] Fyfe, C. (1964) pp.49-53, a translation from the French of du Jarric, P. (1608) III, pp.409-13.

Sacrificial part or 'Canon' of the Mass, which followed the introductory rites and readings. In spite of the King's pleas for baptism, Barreira

> "replied that he had to prepare him for such a great mystery, and teach him what our faith was and the things that those who receive it are bound to observe . . . "

Barreira continued, but not before

> "explaining to them several points of our faith, and also the reason that had brought him there, which was not to get gold, nor any of the other things men seek, but only to gain their souls to God, by telling them about Him and delivering them from the errors in which they were plunged, and finally to teach them the way and the means to go to heaven." [1]

Barreira created some animus by speaking out against Islam,

> "for this accursed sect had already taken deep root in his Kingdom."

We read that people "from all parts" came to listen and to ask for baptism, and the King took advantage of the presence of several vassal Kings to indulge in pomp and to draw attention to his enhanced status, now that the priest had honoured him with his presence. Not only did the King want baptism, but he declared that

> "all his vassals must follow his example. Then he began to exalt and to praise our holy faith highly, reprobating and vilifying the abominable sect of Mahomet,"

until a Muslim from the crowd

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[1] Fyfe, C. loc.cit.

> "did nothing but revile and decry our faith,
> and [. . .] exalt the sect of Mahomet . . . " [1]

and whatever gains Barreira may have hoped for were lost within a few days.

The account provides an interesting glimpse of Barreira, and what we know about subsequent relations between Catholicism and Islam - and indeed earlier ones - is not at odds with common Catholic attitudes, and reveals a contradiction between professed Christian virtues of charity and tolerance, and the reaction to specific situations and problems; a contradiction which can be discerned in the course of missionary work in Sierra Leone, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The Jesuits had sent Father Manuel Alvarez to assist Barreira, and they systematically trained a group of local people as leaders of the growing Christian community at Caracore.[2] Barreira was actively considering a Seminary in Sierra Leone for training indigenous clergy, but the King of Portugal wanted it in his own country and the impasse was never resolved; had it been, the history of Catholic Missions in West Africa might have been very different. But Barreira did make great efforts to build an ecclesial foundation suited to the local conditions and people among whom he lived and who seem to have had a genuinely affectionate respect for him. Working with, rather than in opposition to local rulers as much as possible, he was committed to building

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[1] Fyfe, C. loc.cit.

[2] Possibly present day Tombo Island.

slowly something which would survive his passing and grow.[1] With Alvarez, he gained the confidence of rulers who in turn displayed great zeal for spreading their new religion.[2] Apparently, polygamous men now lived freely and happily in monogamous unions and baptism seems to have been the outward sign of a real interior conversion which was maintained throughout life. The quality of these conversions and the ambience in which they took place and were maintained, are beyond our scope here,[3] but by his policy of setting up organized communities of Christians, Barreira was trying to help them create an environment in which their new religion and ethic had a better chance of enduring, than where individual converts were isolated and rarely visited, as was often the case in later times.

In late 1609 at the age of seventy-two, Barreira departed, leaving Alvarez alone until 1617 when he too left for Lisbon. In 1653 the Jesuits were officially replaced by Spanish Franciscan Capuchins,[4] though they had attempted to continue the Mission and

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1 The failure to establish a Seminary in Sierra Leone in the seventeenth century should not be underestimated, for in the nineteenth century missionaries found little trace of Catholicism, for all the work of the Jesuits and Capuchins.

2 In 1606 Barreira wrote to his superiors opining that Sierra Leone was the most suitable centre from which the Christian faith could spread throughout West Africa: Hamelberg, E. (1964) p.5.

3 The behaviour of some of the less scrupulous Portuguese traders on the West Cost, men involved in slavery as well as other trading, was deleterious to the progress of the Mission, and created the kind of scandal which "precipita la ruine de l'édifice spirituelle des missionaires." Hamelberg, op.cit.

4 cf. Latourette, K.S. (1940) III, p.20, for details on the Capuchins.

even in 1610 the Jesuit Provincial Superior of Portugal had written to his King and laid out his plans to have at least three priests in Sierra Leone as part of a team.[1]

1-3.3 Spanish Capuchins

Before the official Jesuit withdrawal in 1647, a Spanish Capuchin arrived in Sierra Leone to pick up the threads of earlier work, though the previous priest, Alvarez, had left thirty years before. The new missionary was Seraphin de Léon, and the circumstances of his arrival are interesting.

In 1619 the Capuchins had been thinking of sending men to Guinea[2] and the Congo.[3] Three years later the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith was established, and by 1634 it had decided on the advisability of sending the Capuchins to Africa. But there remained political problems and Portuguese rights in Africa were clearly stated; the Pope could not easily ignore Portuguese sensibilities.

A Jesuit priest made a direct request of the Pope in 1644, for missionaries for the East, and despite Portuguese protests, a policy of direct Papal appointment to the Missions was initiated. In the same year, the Andalousian Province of the

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1 "Trois autres seraient stationnés ailleurs sur la côte de Guinée; et un groupe de dix pour une maison centrale d'administration et de formation aux Iles Cap Verte, (my emphasis). Brasio (1955). This is the second plan (after Barreira's), to have a house for the formation of indigenous clergy in mission lands, rather than in Europe.

2 i.e. The whole of West Africa "Upper" and "Lower" Guinea ("the two Guineas") referred respectively to the African coast from Senegal (Senegambia) to the mouth of the Niger, and from the Niger to the Congo rivers. The Papal Jurisdiction of The Two Guineas extended in fact to the Cape in South Africa. Written usage is often confusing.

3 Latourette, K.S. (1940) III, p.34.

Capuchins made clear to the Pope that it was ready to undertake appointments to Africa. Thus it was that Spanish priests, directly under Papal protection, were now destined for Africa. To the Capuchins were confided the territories now known as Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone.[1]

Seraphin de Léon was among a dozen volunteers, and on his arrival in the country he resided where Barreira had lived, and was followed by four more Capuchins.[2] It appears that all twelve volunteers nearly went to Sierra Leone but they actually spread farther afield.[3] Seraphin worked for about thirteen years, once writing from Arrecife in Guinea[4] that he preferred Sierra Leone.[5] Like Barreira he was requested "by three or four Kings to give them baptism, for themselves, for their sons, and for their family"[6] and it would seem that he did indeed contact some of the survivors from Barreira's time, in particular an old King who, after more than forty years, no longer knew

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1 Lintingre, P. (1971).

2 Hamelberg, E. (MSS)

3 Lintingre, P. op.cit. p.96 ftnote 15: "Suivant le Père Anguiano, « la 1ère direction de cette Mission selon les ordres de la Congrégation de la Propagande, devait être la Sierra Leone », Missiones Capuchinas en Africa, II, p.71. Pourtant, le champ Apostolique, qui avait été assigné aux travaux de la Province d'Andalousie, était ainsi-limité: « au nord par le Sahara, à l'ouest par la Guineé, sans limitation vers l'intérieur ». Bullarium cit.333. Et la Sierra Leone faisait alors partie de ce que l'on appelait la Guineé.

4 i.e. The West Coast: the boundaries of present day French Guinea were not of course drawn.

5 Seraphin wrote "les habitants de Sierra Leone ont bien meilleur esprit que ceux d'ici." Lintingre, P. op.cit.

6 Lintingre, P. op.cit. p.121.

> "how to make the sign of the Cross. He wanted to know Christian doctrine again, and the duties and obligations of Christians. He only knew the very rudiments." [1]

This illustrates well, a situation which was to cause great problems to missionaries in the nineteenth century: in two periods spanning seventy-five years, seven priests including Barreira, Alvarez and Seraphin, were quite simply too few to create, encourage and maintain a Christian community. Seraphin possibly extended himself over too wide an area, for it is recorded that he baptized "thousands" and gained "numerous conversions" [2] from among the Lokos where he worked with another priest, but his work was not followed up. From 1680, when the last of the Capuchins had already died, there would be no resident priest for a further hundred and eighty years, and even then only on the coast, until the beginning of the twentieth century.

Seraphin undertook to evangelize the local rulers, including Kings and "a great Emperor of the Sapis or Safi", [3] but was himself aware of the shortage of clergy to continue and develop the works so he persevered in the hope of reinforcements. [4] He did not

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[1] Lintingre, P. op.cit. p.122

[2] Hamelberg, E. (MS) p.2.

[3] Lintingre, P. op.cit. The "Sapis or Safi" were a congeries of tribes. The word comes from and is a corruption of the Portuguese Capijis. Rodney, W. (1970) p.323, calls them "Sape". cf. Note 1, p.11 infra.

[4] In 1655 Seraphin wrote: "Il est certain que si le(s) roi(s) des Sapis et cet autre roi, grand possesseur de terres, n'ont pas encore reçu le Saint baptême, c'est uniquement par manque de ministres. Je n'ai pas pu moi-même les assister, à cause des occupations que j'ai dans quatre villages de Chrétiens; marier, consoler les malades, conduire les défunts en terre Sainte, pour les vivants composer des placets, instruire les uns et les autres par un exercise continuel, et en particulier par plus d'une heure de doctrine Chrétienne, chaque jour après la récitation du Rosaire; prêcher les dimanches et les fêtes, etc. . . . " Miss.Cap. en Africa. II, 91-93, in Lintingre, P. loc.cit.

aim simply to proselytize - to make converts - but to work deliberately and slowly to establish the sure foundations for a Christian community. And though there are "thousands" of baptisms and "numerous conversions", there is no proof of indiscriminate baptizing, and with meticulous groundwork among the Loko it is not unreasonable to suppose that his work attracted villages en masse to the Christian faith, as did that of Francis Xavier in India. He carefully taught Christian doctrine and concentrated on nurturing a Christian ethos suited to and approved by the people. Churches were built, and the field of action was extended. The fact that an "Emperor" and Kings were baptized, no doubt encouraged the people to follow their example. One may be tempted to cast a jaundiced eye on this record of apparent conversions, yet there survive no signs of force or undue persuasion by Kings, Chiefs or missionaries. Historical sleuthing is not warranted here; but one may bear in mind the attitudes and reception of the seventeenth century missionaries, when later gauging the policies of and reception accorded to the Holy Ghost Fathers.

Apparently, by 1678, the year of Seraphin's death - he had retired from Sierra Leone about 1670 - his pleas for reinforcements had been heard, and according to Lintingre there were fourteen Capuchins supplying help for Sierra Leone.[1] But is is extremely unlikely that anything like that number resided in Sierra Leone

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[1] Lintingre, P. op.cit. p.128.

at any one time, and certain that by 1688 Portuguese opposition and harrassment had forced the withdrawal from Guinea of the mission. The next resident priests arrived in Freetown in 1859, and within six weeks all were dead or gone.

A final mention of missions in the 1670's is a note on the work of the Capuchins and Dominicans in the missions of the Guinea coast. A priest, Jerome de Firezeval, reported that

> "the blacks were docile [and] listened willingly to the mysteries of the faith . . . "

He continues, saying that a Spanish gentleman tried to finance a Mission, without success.[1] This looks like a reference to the mission of the fourteen Spanish Capuchins recorded above,[2] but is no more enlightening on the question of how many were resident in Sierra Leone.[3]

1-4 CATHOLICS IN SIERRA LEONE, 1680 - 1859

For about two hundred years after the middle of the seventeenth century, between what was characterized above as the third and fourth phases of missionary development (pp.11-14 supra), the Catholic Church saw the decline of its missionary expansion

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[1] "Les noirs étaient dociles, écoutaient volontiers les mystères de la foi, et . . . parmi les nombreux baptisés se trouvaient trois rois et un empereur! Déjà cinq églises avaient été baties. En 1677 un seigneur espagnol s'offrit, pour entretenir à ses frais, douze Capuchins de la Mission de la Sierra Leone, et obtint, l'année suivante, une lettre de recommendation pour l'Evêque du Cap Vert; mais le manque des sujets et l'insalubrité du climat firent, peu-à-peu, tomber cette Mission. N.D. C.SSp. (Cabon) V. p.9.

[2] cf. Note 1 p.26 supra.

[3] Hamelberg, E. (MSS) says a Portuguese Capuchin, Andre de Faro, visited Sierra Leone between 1663 and 1664 and met at "Tombo" a resident Spanish Capuchin. "His vivid record of this visit has been published". Silveira, L. (1945) p.188. Hamelberg simply notes that three Arragonese Capuchins were intended for Sierra Leone.

and involvement: Gallicanism, Jansenism and the Age of Rationalism and Positivism, stand as signposts to the changing mood of Europe, a mood which was reflected in a decline in vocations to the priesthood, criticism of religion, and the consequent dearth of missionaries.

Though from the 1680's it seems virtually certain that any priests in Sierra Leone were simply in transit, there remain some signs of their brief passage, and of the vestiges of Christianity.

A Seignor Joseph is mentioned in Sierra Leone in 1714, but the accounts of Butt-Thompson and Bane, are unreliable and contradictory.[1]

Later, a much more reliable account, showing that there must have been occasional visits by priests to Sierra Leone in the eighteenth century, comes from the Governor in 1793 or 1794,[2] Zachary Macauley. He wrote of a former slave-trader, Signor Dominguez, saying that he visited Dominguez and

> "found him at dinner with Pa Sirey who is nominated King of Lo(n)go and is a Miraboo or Mohammedan priest (whom he has at present employed in assisting

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[1] Bane, M. op.cit. says that Signor Joseph landed in Sierra Leone in 1714 (he had been born there and educated and baptized in England and Portugal) and went to the Jesuit house on Mount Aureol (p.103). There were no resident Jesuits in Sierra Leone, and this part of the story, at least, is a fabrication of Captain Butt-Thompson (op.cit.) John Atkins visited Sierra Leone in 1721 and met "Signor Joseph" who had just moved his town nine miles up river, describing him as having visited England, and then Portugal, where he had been baptized. "He has built a little oratory for his People's devotions; erected a Cross; taught several of his kindred letters, dispersing among them little Romish Prayer Books, and many of them are known by Christian names . . . " Atkins, J. (1735) pp.51-5.

[2] Bane, M. op.cit. p.109: Butt-Thompson, F. (1926) p.60.

> at his sacrifices to the devil). Signor Dominguez reads the Portuguese language fluently. After dinner he produced his Mass book and prayed with seeming devotion for some time. He gave me to understand that it is a constant practice with him morning and evening. He expressed grave concern that for some years past he had seen no priest to whom he might confess his sins, and from whom he might receive absolution." [1]

More interesting perhaps is a letter from the British Agent in Sierra Leone in 1788. John Matthews writes that the Portuguese missionaries from Santiago in the Cape Verde Islands, still visited the Guinea Coast (consistent with Signor Dominguez' reference to priests). He also speaks of the type of Christianity found in Sierra Leone on the eve of the arrival of the Colonists:

> "The natives are originally Suzées, but the principal people call themselves Portuguese, claiming descent from the colonists of that nation who were formerly settled here, though they do not retain the smallest trace of European extraction; but having had a white man once in the family, is sufficient to give them the appellation. They also profess the Roman Catholic religion; and are visited once or twice a year by a priest from the Portuguese settlement of Bassou, who baptizes their children and receives their confession of faith according to his dictates; yet the most enlightened of them are merely nominal Christians. Their religion principally consists of repeating a Pater Noster, or an Ave Maria, and in wearing a large string of beads round their neck, with a cross, or crucifix suspended. In every other respect they follow the customs and ceremonies of their pagan countrymen; but generally exceed them in treachery and revenge." [2]

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[1] Copied by Bane, M. (with a few small errors) from Knutsford, (1900) q.v.

[2] Matthews, J. (1788) pp.13-14.

Such quotations as these, indicate something of the nature of Christianity in Sierra Leone, when priests had been long gone. With the new wave of Christian missionary activity in the nineteenth century, there opens not only a new chapter in the history of missions in Sierra Leone, but a completely new phase in the history of missions in general: and the work of previous priests in Sierra Leone was hardly acknowledged, and had been practically obliterated by the time the Holy Ghost Fathers became established in Freetown. In 1866, the Superior of the Catholic Mission began to compile a history of the mission and a record of its progress. He starts:

> "It is said (and it seems probable enough), that the country had formerly been evangelized by the Dominicans and Franciscans, but they have left no trace at all of their passage, and the oldest people in the country have never heard it spoken of; if indeed these Catholic Missions really existed, they must be placed in the seventeenth century - the time at which several Catholic Missions flourished, those of the Congo among others." [1]

The writer was clearly not aware, in any dynamic sense, of his continuing a line of previous missionary activity in Sierra Leone, nor, admitting their possible existence does he know or seem particularly interested in such missionaries' field of activity, their methods and their results. It is as if the past were a missing page of Sierra Leone's history in which the work of Spanish

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[1] The "history" written by Father E. Blanchet goes from "the principal events from the foundation of Sierra Leone in 1788" (Ch.1), to the departure of Blanchet himself in 1892 (Ch.8). It is in MSS. in French, with a later, typed translation into English. The quotations here are in my own translation. ref. Blanchet, E. (1892) History of the Catholic Mission.

and Portuguese missionaries were recorded for an unresponsive posterity. It does not appear that there was much cumulative mission experience vicariously available to the nineteenth century missionaries.

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had indeed been an era of great missionary expansion and evangelization in the wake of the Geographical Discoveries and the revitalized Church of the Counter-Reformation. West Africa had promised, in theory, to be as fertile a ground for the seed of the Gospel as India, China, South America, and elsewhere. But one simple fact remains. In the context of Jesuit achievements in India and elsewhere we note that

> "in striking contrast with all this glory [i.e. of Francis Xavier and others], is the failure of every one of the Missions on the Dark Continent of Africa. Between 1547 and 1561 the Congo and Angola had been visited, but no permanent posts had been established",[1]

and it will be an intrinsic part of the present study, to consider and assess to what degree, if at all, missionaries in Sierra Leone, were or became haunted by the spectre of failure or futility, as they defined the terms.

1-5 THE SECOND SPRING

After the foundation of Freetown as a colony for freed slaves, an increasing number of Protestant Churches mobilized and organized missions to Sierra Leone from Europe and America, and by the middle of the nineteenth century the Anglican diocese of Freetown was almost ready to be confided to indigenous clergy.[2]

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[1] Campbell, S. (1921) Vol.1, Ch.III, p.85.

[2] In 1863 the Anglican diocese of Freetown was erected, with an African Bishop and clergy.

By the time the Catholics were able to undertake another Mission to Sierra Leone, religious rivalry and jealousies were strong, and the Catholics felt that the "heretics" had stolen the march on them.[1] A good deal of hostility and a seeming delight in any set-backs suffered by non-Catholics, characterized the Catholic attitude[2] and stemmed from the conviction held by the Catholics, that Protestants were not merely trying but succeeding in corrupting the minds of the people and leading them away from the "One True Church" of Rome.

In 1841 Francis Libermann, founder of the recently formed Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, received Papal approval for his project to devote the energies of his men to the welfare of the most abandoned souls of the black race.[3] He had a handful of men and official encouragement, but no jurisdiction over any part of Africa. In 1843 he met Monsignor (Bishop) Barron, Prefect Apostolic of the Two Guineas - a Prefecture which stretched from Senegal to

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[1] An assertion to be documented in due course.

[2] And this attitude was reciprocated by the Protestants: such rivalry runs right through Protestant-Catholic relations until quite recently, though it was not universal. There were tolerant, creative people from all denominations, and if part of the more forgettable historical relationships is resurrected here, it is only in order to look at sociologically significant attitudes and the development of collective representations among missionaries.

[3] " . . . ubicumque pauperibus et infidelibus evangelizare, munia ecclesiastica infima et laboriosa, pro quibus ministri difficillime reperiuntur, non modo suscipere, sed etiam corde amare, ac prae ceteris eligere." Rules and Constitutions of the Congregation. Paris 1957. Ch.2, sect.3.

the Cape of Good Hope.[1] Libermann's offer of personnel was gratefully received since Barron was looking for men, and in the same year the first missionaries sailed from Bordeaux to Cape Palmas (Liberia).[2]

Barron himself had sailed as far as Monrovia, Liberia, in 1842, and had formed a fairly clear idea of what he wanted to undertake and accomplish in Africa. He saw polygamy, the climate, and the linguistic complexities as the three major problems[3] which he intended to tackle. Even at that date he met some Africans who professed the Catholic faith, but he noted that their ignorance was deplorable.[4] A man of great determination, he speaks in a report of September 1842 of the need to confide the territory of the West Coast to a missionary organization with lay Brothers as well as priests, for he saw the necessity of schools for teaching Christianity and of teaching trades to the people, as well as other practical skills.[5]

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[1] Barron was Vicar General of the diocese of Philadelphia, U.S.A., then Prefect Apostolic of "Upper Guinea", and in 1842 of the Vicariate of the Two (Upper and Lower) Guineas and Sierra Leone.

[2] N.D. C.S.Sp.(Cabon) V. pp.40ff.

[3] Barron's report, N.D. C.S.Sp. Cabon, V. pp.13ff.

[4] loc.cit. p.19.

[5] loc.cit. pp.19-29. He specifically mentions the necessity of learning local languages, and does not in any way downgrade them in his plans for education and evangelization. He says that Libermann's plan "seems to me the only one that can succeed; he insists on establishing schools for the natives, from which one can get vocations . . . We can't hope either, for these missions ever to be well enough staffed with European missionaries, because the climate is murderous, and those who come from Europe are unable to stay long enough to learn the language." (pp.38-39.)

Barron was particularly impressed with the prospects afforded by Sierra Leone and records in 1845 that there are about forty Catholics. He said Mass, preached twice and baptized a dozen people, giving the Last Rites to one person and the Eucharist to another:[1] perhaps a premature harvest for so brief and isolated a visit.

The Prefect Apostolic maintained a vigorous correspondence[2] with Libermann, and had great admiration for both him and his plans even though Libermann had never been and never went to Africa. Writing to Rome about progress, Barron shows clearly what a great influence Libermann was to have on the development of Mission policy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The letters further emphasise the need for education for the Africans and the necessity for stability and continuity of personnel which that implied. Barron pointed out that insufficient personnel meant at best consolidation, but would inhibit expansion of missionary works, and reiterated the need for forming a native clergy. He favoured Sierra Leone claiming that

> "the English authorities would be very glad if we made a mission here; they are disgusted with the Methodists . . . At present I would like a mission in Sierra Leone rather than at Palmas or Cap de Mont.[3] If you [Libermann] have any martyrs, send them to us, so as not to abandon Palmas, Sierra Leone and Cap de Mont.[4] . . . And Sierra Leone should be the chef lieu, the centre, because it is situated near several of the places mentioned; there is English protection there,

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[1] N.D. C.S.Sp.(Cabon) V. p.37. In 1823 Anne Marie Javouhey, a nun and teacher in Freetown - and the very first Catholic missionary in Sierra Leone in the nineteenth century - wrote of "many Catholics", their hopes of a priest, and her own belief that much good could be accomplished in Sierra Leone. cf. Bane, M. op.cit. p.113.

[2] N.D. C.S.Sp.(Cabon) V. pp.1-63.

[3] N.D. C.S.Sp.(Cabon) V. p.60.

[4] loc.cit.

> and a continual communication with the places named, as with Europe . . . Do something, my dear friend, for Sierra Leone and its environs." [1]

Libermann's priests were indeed to go to Sierra Leone, but not for a further twenty years, and Barron meanwhile, discouraged by sickness, deaths, and the interminable problems connected with the establishment of the Mission, resigned,[2] and the Mission project now came under the direct control of Propaganda. In 1853 it was offered to the Jesuits who did not accept, apparently because they were already too extended and had lost numerous missionaries in Madagascar. The Dominicans were then offered the same Mission, but after first accepting, reversed their decision. Now the only priests in Sierra Leone were those travelling between France and Gabon, who only stopped "long enough to baptize the children who were brought to them for baptism." [3]

But in 1856 it finally looked as though the future of the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone was assured. In that year, a former Pro-Vicar Apostolic of Coimbatore in India (1846-55), Monsignor de Marion de Bresillac, obtained from Propaganda jurisdiction over the whole of "The Two Guineas", on condition that he first establish a Mission at Sierra Leone, before going to Widah, which seems to have been his first choice.[4] De Bressillac founded in Lyons in 1857, a house for training priests "specifically for evangelizing black Africans, especially those living on the Coast, between Sierra Leone

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[1] op.cit., p.63.

[2] N.D. C.S.Sp.(Cabon) V. p.122.

[3] Blanchet, E. (1892) Chapter One, records this.

[4] Blanchet, E. (1892) Chapter One.

and Fernando Po."[1] The first two priests left France for a short period of acclimatization in Dakar in November 1858, followed on May 14th 1859 by de Bresillac, another priest, and two Brothers - one of whom returned almost immediately to France.

Letters which survive from this period paint a vivid picture of the Freetown of 1859 and the attitudes of Protestant and Catholic missionaries. De Bressillac records his arrival:

> "At four o'clock [16th May 1859] we touched the land which was to be henceforth the theatre of our zeal - a land deserted under every aspect. The climate, which is always bad in Sierra Leone, seemed at this moment to redouble its evilness , so much so we advised the captain not to let any of his crew go ashore. The Europeans are dying like flies . . . "[2]

They had landed at the outbreak of an unusually severe epidemic of Yellow Fever: one priest, Father Riocreux, died on June 2nd; three days later Father Bresson died, and when de Bresillac succumbed on June 25th, he died the last but one of the small band. In his final letter, a week before his death, de Bresillac wrote:

> "It is a long while for a man to do nothing for eight days, but take medicine after medicine. I can take it no longer. I hope Fr. Reymond will give . . . more ample details. I am overwhelmed with sadness and fatigue."[3]

On July 20th 1859 the French Vice-Consul of Sierra Leone informed the Vicar Apostolic of Dakar, Monsignor Kobès, of the annihilation.[4]

> "I regret to announce to you the death of Mgr. Marie Bresillac, together with the other

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[1] Blanchet. loc.cit.

[2] n.d. Freetown. A rather inferior English translation, (perhaps intended as literal) undated.

[3] n.d. Freetown. loc.cit.

[4] n.d. Freetown. loc.cit. I reproduce this letter as it appears in the n.d., and have not found the original source. The defects of grammar and style are in the type-script.

> missionaries that accompanied him, Fathers Riocreux, Bresson, Raymond, and the Brothers. I brought Mgr. de Marie Bresillac to my house at the beginning of his sickness in order to give him all the care that his sickness demanded, he did not last the normal number of days that this horrible epidemic yellow-fever, fixes. This sickness is decimating us. He died after four days' sickness. Fr. Raymond who assisted him piously right up to his last moments, died the next day from the same sickness.
>
> I have the honour to be etc.
>
> de Seignac Lesseps

The French missionaries could have accomplished very little in their short stay, and certainly did not get outside Freetown. The Superior of de Bresillac's Society of African Missions, discouraged and shaken, received permission from Rome, to abandon Sierra Leone.

In 1703 there had been founded in Paris the Seminary and Society of the Holy Ghost, an independent body of priests, dedicated to poverty and vowed to shun ambitious self-seeking, who offered their services for any difficult work for which Rome or local Bishops could not find personnel. After the French Revolution, the Society was almost without personnel, but in 1848 Libermann's Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, combined with the Society of the Holy Ghost[1] with Libermann himself as the first Superior General. To the new Congregation of the Holy Ghost (henceforth referred to as the Holy Ghost Fathers) the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda turned, requesting men for the Sierra

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[1] cf. Koren, H. (1958). As early as 1817 Louis XVIII charged the Society of the Holy Ghost "de fournir seul des prêtres à toutes les colonies françaises." The Society had been founded for "les autres postes abandonnes, pour lesquels les evêques ne trouvent presque jamais personne" and the "Community of the Holy Spirit" had been recognized by letters patent in May 1726, but these had been revoked in 1792 and 1809, and the Congregation reestablished in 1805 and again in 1816; it had had a very checquered history. Further interesting information about the Society founded by Claude Poullart des Places, can be found in Lintingre, P., 1966.

Leone Mission. Libermann himself died in 1852 but the Holy Ghost Fathers accepted the Mission, partly because they had recently established themselves in Ireland and aimed to provide English-speaking priests for Africa.

1-6 THE MISSIONARY MYTH-MAKING PROCESS

However convinced missionaries undoubtedly were, of the dignity of their calling and the importance of their instrumentality on bringing all men to a knowledge and service of God and His Son Jesus Christ, they still had to face very real reversals and hardships. They saw themselves as called by God to undertake a difficult work, and believed that their fidelity to their priestly promises would assure them of eternal life and result in the widespread planting of the Catholic Church.

Since the work the missionaries undertook, was seen as the work inspired and required by God, there was no way that that work could fail to conquer Africa for Christ and contribute to the growth of the Catholic Church.

But the Catholic missionaries had also been trained neither to be flattered by apparent success, nor to be dismayed by apparent failure, since only God was the judge of "success" or "failure", and the missionary's vocation was to serve faithfully and not count the cost. Yet when men undertake and pursue policies, they inevitably gauge the influence of those policies by whatever yardsticks are available, however humble and self-effacing they may try to be.

Missionaries in strange surroundings facing unforeseen problems and unknown peoples and languages, needed to be united in spirit and dedication, as a community or group with a moral identity and sense of purpose. The individual in a religious Congregation such as the Holy Ghost Fathers, sets great store by the support and encouragement provided by the community, and in his Novitiate training, and schooling in Philosophy and Theology, learns and comes to share many fundamental beliefs and attitudes about his vocation as a missionary. What I may call the rationale shared by missionaries and developed to deal with life's challenges and problems is what is referred to in this thesis as the "Missionary Myth". The word "myth" is used not in any technical anthropological sense, but simply as a portmanteau word to include explanations, rationalizations and aspirations shared by the missionaries and serving to bind them together as a community of men with common work, aims and acceptance of whatever should befall them.

What might appear illogical or contradictory to outsiders was, through the missionary myth-making process, tolerable, and carried the potential for growth: what to many people may have been regarded as insufferable, unjust or discouraging,[1] could by

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[1] The search for personalistic explanations in the context of events which seem to an individual either particularly unfair or particularly apposite, is not simply a characteristic of the Azande (Evans-Pritchard 1937). The demand for an answer to an extra "why", is made by most people at some time, even though this may mark them as employing "magical" rather than "scientific" reasoning. The missionary operates in a personalistic universe as missionary, seeing the influence of Divine Grace and the hand of Providence at work, though not for all that, condemned to confusing religious and scientific explanations. See Willer, J. (1971) p.46f.

application of the logic and spirit of faith engendered by the missionary myth, be not only accepted but embraced. If this seems a rather strange notion let me give some brief examples of the importance of the missionary myth, and suggest that if it weakened or broke down, one could expect confusion and crisis to overcome missionary undertakings. Then in tracing the development of missionary works in Sierra Leone in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it should be possible to trace the development and relative strength of the missionary myth, and its effect on both the missionaries themselves, and on the Mende people among whom they worked.

Some of the theological explanations invoked by missionaries must be spelt out here if we are to understand their behaviour just as some of the "magical" explanations invoked by Mende are relevant to an anthropological understanding of theirs. The fact that theological or magical explanations are not scientific[1] does not deny their sociological importance.

A problem frequently faced by missionaries was that though they believed themselves to be responding to a call from God, and though they had left for Africa in good health and youthful strength,

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[1] Willer, J. (1971) p.46. [The Zande type] "of explanation may be explained by the theory of magical knowledge in that it is concerned with the connection of particular to particular. Zande explanation provides an extra WHY for any event, a WHY which modern western civilization (not concerned with power-relations in EVERY event) attributes to chance. In a magical system of knowledge however, nothing happens without having been caused to do so; nothing happens which is not a manifestation of power." If we substitute "missionary" (qua missionary) for "Zande", and perhaps "Providence" for "power", the resulting assertion is remarkably redolent of missionary attitudes to important events.

many of their number died almost before they had started their missionary work. It may seem hard to accept that there could be any reconciliation between this simple fact and a Loving God who called men to be "fishers of men". Even if such a reconciliation could be made, there was the further fact that some men lived and served for forty years or more in Africa. But if one accepted that "man proposes, God disposes", that the missionary was an instrument whose effectiveness was a function not of his longevity nor of his intelligence, but of his dedication and holiness; and further, that God's ways are mysterious, that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, that God alone produces the results, and that the missionary must not worry about tomorrow but live in faith and trust, then whether a missionary died within a week or worked for half a century, was something to be accepted with equanimity by himself and other missionaries. I do not wish to caricature Catholic doctrine, but merely record that the missionary was trained and encouraged to accept all, from the hands of a loving God, in a spirit of faith and not of dissent.[1]

If one believes oneself to be in the hand of God, as it were, and that one's ultimate good is eternal life, then situations in which death is a real possibility can become potentially good, even desirable. To die in the cause of the good and for what one believes to be right, is happiness; to live in the cause of self-interest is to the missionary a betrayal of one's vocation and destiny.

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[1] Teleological explanations (relating to the purposiveness of events in terms of a Divine Plan, by definition incomprehensible to a human mind) are as important to the missionary as aetiological explanations (relating to the origin or causes of events).

Thus death can now be explained in terms of Divine Providence, and the apparent contradictions and problems raised above, can be overcome. But human nature fears death, and missionaries need to be sustained and encouraged in their high-minded ideals. The deposit of faith, biblical and other teachings, and the spirit of zeal and charity encouraged by founders of religious orders and fostered by their members, constitute the "missionary myth"; and its maintenance through time, its application to new situations and its influence on new recruits, is what is referred to here as the myth-making process.

"Success" and "failure" are relative terms applied to undertakings which exercise mankind everywhere. The missionary was "other-worldly" in his aspirations and the Society of the Holy Ghost had dedicated its members not to be motivated by mundane ambition. Again, the ideal and the reality can be distinguished, but to the trained missionary "failure" was only an issue if one lost confidence and faith in God. To men who accepted that ultimate failure as the only real failure, their duty was clear: God's Will be done. Effort may produce satisfaction and renewed incentive, but was no cause for complacency or self-glorification; and if the best efforts were greeted with derision, setbacks and little or no satisfaction, then appeal could be made to the belief that God was just testing and firing his human instruments. Whatever the vicissitudes, the missionary myth could create or invoke a scenario in terms of which missionaries could rediscover themselves and persevere. Only if and when the missionary felt himself isolated, unloved or unequal to the task, would he be tempted to capitulate in the face of problems. But the missionary myth was at its most powerful in precisely such

situations, and we shall see many examples illustrating its invocation and its effectiveness.

And just as a long life in the missions was greeted as an indication of Divine favour, even though a premature death was not interpreted as a sign of Divine displeasure, so, while reversals could be accepted by reference to the missionary myth, likewise progress, the promotion of missionary policy, or encouraging results of any endeavour, could be and were accepted as signs of Divine favour and the vindication of the missionary dedication. Usually, premature self congratulations were not indulged by Superiors; reverses often followed, as experience taught, but more importantly the missionary should humbly thank God for such blessings and continue his work. This was an important balance to the missionary myth, for the missionary must remember he was an instrument in the Divine Plan, and if he assumed the initiative too much, he could expect a rude reminder of his fallibility. To check the impetuous idealism of men who wanted to win Africa for Christ, and to encourage the missionary to be at the disposition of his God, in His plan for Africa, was a balance difficult for Superiors to achieve.

The missionary myth could be further appealed to, to justify a variety of missionary attitudes. The missionary was European yet in Africa; he had left Europe yet could never be fully integrated into Mende society; and he had, while being sympathetic to the people with whom he worked, to maintain his own principles and uphold what he considered to be the immutable law of God. At times, serious tensions could arise in a man trying to sympathize without compromise.

One missionary could settle to an administrative post and still feel very much part of a missionary effort, because his fidelity to a job which may not have appealed to him personally, allowed others to be more actively engaged in Pastoral ministry. Another, building schools or Churches, almost to the exclusion of everything else, could feel fulfilled as a missionary though he rarely preached or trekked from village to village. The missionary myth sustained a variety of personalities in various functions, so long as the men saw themselves as unified in diversity, or as the different organs of one body - a simile straight from the Epistles of St. Paul. But if the spirit of community should be somehow undermined, one can hypothesize that there would be less readiness on the part of some, to accept uncongenial jobs or functions not consistent with their ideas of the essential missionary vocation, or less contentment in performing certain tasks. So long as individualism was subordinated for the good of the community of missionaries, and so long as missionaries accepted and grew into the mentality of the missionary myth, a situation obtained relative to which one can speak of "missionary ideas" or "missionary policy" in a unitary way. If individualism should prosper unchecked and the tenets of the missionary myth be questioned or rejected, then it would be meaningless to speak of such a thing as "missionary policy" or "missionary ideas", without important qualifications. As the notion of the missionary myth is further explained, the implications of this statement will be assessed.

In 1859 de Bresillac wrote to the secretary of the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith, for the first time.

Though beset with difficulties already, he was full of courage and hope. His implicit appeal to the missionary myth is well exemplified in his language.

> "Many things seemed at first to favour us. but the power which the demon has acquired here, turned opportunities into obstacles. It is certain that this enemy of God and of man, is enthroned in this place. However, if God is with us, who can withstand us?" [1]

With the myth strong, there could be no thought of "failure" for pioneers such as de Bresillac. But as we trace the history of Catholic missions we will see that the missionary myth was subject to considerable pressure as problems multiplied, and note the stirrings of feelings of relative failure and some discontent [2] when the statistics for Sierra Leone were compared with those for other Missions.

Thus, while using the idea of "the missionary myth" as a useful heuristic device, it will be necessary to scrutinize its manifestations and possible change over time.

When mere survival was a real problem, we might expect that the missionary myth sustained and encouraged missionaries who knew they were likely to suffer serious and even mortal sicknesses. The missionary hoped for a long and fruitful Apostolate if that were to be God's will, but he had also been trained to see his life as an individual, as not of itself important, and indeed to pray for the grace of martyrdom - the epitome of sacrifical love and the crown of a missionary's life. As Turner expresses it in a useful and

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[1] quoted in Bane, M. (1956) p.131.

[2] As in the sentiments expressed in de Bresillac's last letter - p.16 <u>supra</u>.

provocative article on this theme,[1] the missionaries were committed to the Christian root-paradigm of martyrdom - "[to] underlining the ultimate value of a cause by laying down one's life for it."[2] This sacrifice then, was certainly foreseen, and it might be asked - so the missionary believed - in the shape of a bloody death as a witness of love and a witness to his unswerving fidelity to the message of the Gospel. But the Mende and others in Sierra Leone were generally not bellicose people[3] and the missionaries were rarely in danger of their lives from these peoples: the climate was the real killer.

I believe we can legitimately enunciate the missionary development of the root-paradigm of martyrdom as one facet of the missionary myth: not a bloody martyrdom but a martyrdom to the cause of Christ through tropical sickness or hazard. And this facet not only remained very strong as long as the climate still provided a major obstacle to missionary expansion, but was also re-polished whenever a missionary in later years died at a relatively young age. This is not really surprising: the death of a missionary on African soil, was always an occasion for a gathering of missionaries and hortatory words both to the other missionaries and to the local

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[1] Turner, V. (1974) Ch.2.

[2] Turner, V. op.cit. p.69.

[3] The Hut Tax War of 1898 is an exception as far as missionaries are concerned. Missionaries and their families were killed then, but the Catholic missionaries were not generally afraid of the people, and the idea of martyrdom certainly did not develop for the missionaries with the outbreak of the Hut Tax War: it was part of their commitment. cf. Little (1969) p.47f. Fyfe (1962) p.593-606 passim.

people. And such words could be well expressed through the emotive notion of martyrdom, and its attribution to the deceased. The deceased received respect and recognition; the other missionaries, exhortation and a rekindling of their common idealism.

But I wish further to suggest that missionaries may have been predisposed to a kind of West Coast depression, sociologically and not only psychologically important. Some data will be adduced later, but meanwhile we can consider some evidence for the assertion: In 1840, Bishop Barron was writing to a nun:

> "I think I should warn you that the effect of African fevers is to weaken the spirit as much as the body and to produce melancholy discouragement." [1]

In 1844 he had written to Libermann explicitly asking the latter to send any "martyrs" to his mission,[2] and Libermann had to step in and warn his men against imprudences which would cause their premature death. He told them not to be martyrs too soon,[3] yet their zeal was perhaps untempered, and the crown of a heroic death on the West coast a very real aspiration, which seemed to counteract long-term plans. Perhaps that some at least of those deaths, were gratuitous.[4]

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[1] ND. C.S.Sp. Cabon, V.p.80 (undated).

[2] op.cit. p.60.

[3] op.cit. VI.5.

[4] As early as 1827 the Acting-Governor of the Colony of Sierra Leone, K. Macaulay, q.v. wrote:

> "I cannot help attributing much of the more recent mortality among missionaries in the first two years of their residence in the Colony, to a morbid state of mind. Other men go out filled with the hope of realizing a little property and returning home; that object occupies their thoughts; sickness is never found till it comes; and then the natural buoyancy of youth and the ardent expectation of the individual, do more towards recovery than all the medicines or doctors in the Colony.
>
> Very different are the feelings of the Missionary; his mind is strongly infused with a dread of the Colony; he looks on himself as sent on a forlorn hope; he considers sickness and

(cont.)

If there was arguably a premature capitulation to death on the part of some missionaries, there was also the tendency to discouragement in the face of the adjudged dominance of Islam. The spread of Islam was not and is not in fact uniform throughout the country, and the records show that the real or imagined strength of Islam in various areas was not infrequently invoked by missionaries as a reason for the failure of Christianity to take root. This may well have been a simple rationalization of lack of statistical success. The ideas held by the Mende in respect of the spread and effect of Islam, were certainly different from those typically held by missionaries, and this fact inevitably affected relations between Mende and missionary. Frequently, mission journals and official speeches and documents, while admitting (perhaps too easily) the influence of Islam, strove to encourage Missionary perseverance and to strengthen the 'myth'.[1]

Apart from Islam and Christianity, we have to pay careful attention to an analysis of the indigenous religion, but in so doing

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[4] (cont.) death in a few years as a certainty: by brooding on the subject he often brings on slight indisposition which his imagination exaggerates into a serious illness, when a man of more ardent temperament and a more elastic turn of mind would throw it off with facility. When to this desponding [sic] state of mind are added the enervating and enfeebling effects, both mental and bodily, of severe fever, I have no doubt that many of the sufferers secretly wish the struggle was over and their course was run. And instead of the least attempt to rally their fainting spirits, they quietly resign themselves to the arms of death."
This of course pre-dates modern Catholic Missions in Sierra Leone but has a redolence of the country and the Missionary ethos which I find remarkable. While Macaulay's interpretation would not concur with that of the missionaries attitude to Saintly deaths in God's name, it does illustrate the point made above.

[1] For further documentation one can look at Berger P. (1967, passim), who develops the useful notion of "plausibility structure" - an analogous but rather more general concept. He sees it as a kind of social charter, able to be applied in order to justify empirical events whereas the "missionary myth" is invoked (implicitly, by missionaries) to provide theological justification and explanation, as well as secondary elaborations of the belief system of missionaries. For secondary elaborations, characteristic of certain belief-systems, according to Evans-Pritchard, see Evans-Pritchard, E.E. (1937).

it is necessary to be aware that to expect to discover Mende religion in a "pure" form is unrealistic. The history of the movement of the Mende; contact with other tribes; exposure to Islam, and perhaps even residual Christianity from previous missionaries and traders, have produced a system which is a blend of pragmatic eclecticism and epistemological syncretism. And the blend varies across the country depending on the historical circumstances. The following analysis takes these facts into account and is partly phenomenological and partly structural in approach.

One final introductory point relating to the Mende people, concerns the traditional role of Mende women, the patriarchal power structure of missionary organization, and the attempts of the Catholic Church to integrate women and promote the ideal of the equality of the sexes. Later we shall see how non-Christian, non-Muslim Mende conducted their worship, and the dominant part played by men. We shall likewise consider the significance and function of the single-sex Societies, and their reaction to Missionary efforts to integrate the sexes in Christian worship. The "natural" groupings within Mende society created patterns quite different from those the missionaries sought to encourage, and the sexual divisions in Mende life - not only of labour, but divisions of a social and religious nature - produced a tension which missionaries felt they had to face and resolve if they were to lay the foundations for a self perpetuating Christian community, which was their fundamental aim.

One of the main problems then, that this final section has attempted to delineate, is that the values and beliefs of missionaries, however they be judged, were brought to a country and a people whose

social organization was alien to that of the missionaries themselves. "Secret Societies", attitudes to and practices of religion, the position of women in the domestic, economic and religious spheres, the presence and influence of Islam, the demographic organization of the Mende, the competitiveness which existed between different groups of missionaries, and a host of other problems, constituted a problem and a challenge - partly acknowledged, partly unseen, - to the missionary, and demanded change and adaptation between him and the Mende people, if Christianity was to have any impact and if the missionaries were to remain personae gratae.

The missionary came with a message and a policy which, explicitly or not, was designed to change people's lifestyle. He believed that the Christian ethic was an absolute improvement over any other, and that it had universal applicability and relevance. But how the Mende reacted to the missionaries, and what elements of the missionary culture and religion he accepted or adapted, may be expected to be such as he could usefully synthesize and rationalize in terms of his own.

Having seen the overall pattern of the Catholic missionary movement up to the mid nineteenth-century, and some introductory ideas about missionary adaptation to Sierra Leone, we now turn to examine the historical, geographical and cultural background of the Mende, before embarking on a fuller analysis of the belief system and religion of the Mende and the missionaries.

CHAPTER TWO:

S I E R R A L E O N E A N D T H E
M E N D E P E O P L E

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2-1 THE MENDE PEOPLE IN HISTORY

In tracing the forerunners of the modern Roman Catholic Missionary movement in Sierra Leone, it was necessary to dig into previous history and describe something of the political and religious climate of Europe, since missionaries from the seventeenth century onwards, were inevitably involved in cultural, religious, and to some extent political aspirations which themselves were rooted in the past.

To produce comparable data on the Mende people is a far more complex problem: apart from the fact that most extant primary sources are in Portuguese, there is disagreement and some speculation on the origins of the Mende people, and in the interests of brevity, it will be possible here only to follow the most generally respected opinions to be found in works printed in English and French. This however, should be sufficient to show some of the historical background of the Mende.

Going back to the sixteenth century, when the West African coast was being increasingly visited from the Iberian peninsula, we find that south of the Corubal river (fig.3), the tribes were fairly homogeneous, and the further south one went, the more similarities there were to be found between adjacent groups. Though in fact a congeries of tribes, they are known in the literature as the Sapes (from the Portuguese Capijis), and comprised the Bulloms, Limbas

and Temnes among the present day peoples of Sierra Leone.[1]

Some time in the sixteenth century - there is still not absolute consensus,[2] though probably between 1546 and 1560 - there took place an invasion from the south by the Mane or Sumba, who overran the Sapes.[3] Several tribes are mentioned in the records relating to this invasion, but not the Mende, who in fact are unique among present-day inhabitants of Sierra Leone, as never having been mentioned in the literature of the sixteenth century. Their background is thus unclear, though it has been forcibly suggested that the Mende are descendants of the Manes who overran the country.[4]

Person[5] traces the Mane invaders to the Kamara or Dyomande from the Upper Niger, and Rodney[6] emphasises that there was significant Mande influence within Mane ranks. Northcote-Thomas suggested that the Loko are "a tribe originally of aboriginal stock but brought so completely under the Manes influence as to adopt their language instead of their own."[7] This, if true, would have involved a long

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[1] Rodney, W. (1970) p.32f: a major reference book for West African History and for this chapter. In this summary, I rely on scholars such as Rodney. Rev. J. Gilroy, C.S.Sp., a missionary of many years in Sierra Leone, is strongly of the opinion that the Sapez or "Capez", were Bullom, Sherbro and Krim. (personal communication.)

[2] op.cit. p.38.

[3] op.cit. p.45.

[4] Northcote-Thomas, W. (1919).

[5] Person, Y. (——) p.322ff. Rodney (1970) p.51, doubts some of the conclusions of Person and Kup (1961), relating to two invasions, one in the seventeenth century.
Dalby, T.D.P. (1969) has a summary of the linguistic situation in Sierra Leone.

[6] op.cit. p.56.

[7] Northcote-Thomas (1919), Part 1, pp.176-188.

period of linguistic change, and one would expect the Lokos to have retained at least some of their own words and perhaps syntactic structures. Now though present day Loko and Mende languages indeed share Mande linguistic characteristics, present day Temne, Bullom and Kissi do not. This gives credence to Northcote-Thomas' suggestion that the origins of the Mende and Loko are to be found in the Mane invasions,[1] as well as providing information which suggests that during their history, since the Mende came into culture-contact with other ethnic groups, some "borrowing" and adaptation very likely occurred.

From present-day Mende themselves, it is difficult to elicit much by way of historical or geographical origins: the majority profess little or no interest. There are two linguistically distinguishable groups of Mende, the Kɔɔ numbering probably between three quarters and four fifths, and the Kpa. Geographically[2] too, they are distinct, as well as culturally, inasmuch as the Kpa Mende have the Wunde society and the Kɔɔ do not: in fact the majority of Kpa questioned, differentiate themselves from non-Kpa, not so much on linguistic or geographical, as on cultural grounds - the Wunde society being their pride and an index of the superior power which they claim.

There is in fact a remarkable range of interpretation for the terms Kɔɔ and Kpa, and Mende people proffer contradictory etymologies with equal conviction. Whatever the words originally

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[1] loc.cit. "I suggest . . . that in the Mendi we have the portion of the Manes who drove out the aborigines or completely dominated them."

[2] See fig.4, p.57.

meant, it would seem - since there are such differing opinions on the part of Mende themselves - that the words have been corrupted and overlaid with secondary interpretations.

Some people point to the direction of the rising sun, Kɔɔ, as their origin, and though Innes[1] glosses this as "east", he also mentioned "north" and "up-country", and indeed people from Pujehun district certainly talk of the Kɔɔ Mende as those "up the line". It is not clear however, whether everyone uses Kɔɔ to mean "the east", "those who come from the east", or those who are "in the east", but Mende certainly say that Kɔɔ means "those who come". In other words, their explanations of Kɔɔ are confusing to an outsider because they are not translations, but explanations of the reference of Kɔɔ.[2]

The Kpa Mende are concentrated in eighteen[3] chiefdoms in the north and north-west part of Mende country. These chiefdoms, corresponding to the old Confederacy of Madame Yoko in the late

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[1] Innes, G. (1969).

[2] kɔ gɔ means to fight a battle, while kpaa gɔ means to fight in reprisal (Innes, "Slave raiding war"). Reconstructing etymologies and meaning is extremely hazardous, but it is not impossible that kɔɔ and kpaa in reference to the Mende, concern fighting qualities. kpai means "severe" or "ugly" (menacing). One informant maintains that kpaa is a corruption of kpai (ugly, severe, sour). A further interesting point of distinction between Kpa and Kɔɔ is that the latter are known as mostly Muslims, while the former are pagans and Christians. As a crude generalization this is probably valid. Some old men of Pujehun district, told me that the Muslims who first came into the south, were called kɔɔ - the "invaders", the "fighters". These same informants maintained that the Kpa Mende came from the East and were definitely not Muslims. The orthography |kpa| and |kpaa| may not be crucial to interpretation.

[3] They are Gorama, Wando, Simbaru, Badjia, Bagwe, Komboya, Valunia, Niawa Lenga, Selenga, Kori, Kowa, Kayamba, Kongbora, Kamajei, Fakunia, Dasse, Gbo, and Kakua; though Kowa, Gbo and Kakua are a mixture nowadays, partly due to the railway towns in that area.

nineteenth century, are fiercely proud of their Wunde society, and some say that Kpa refers to their "strictness", "wickedness" or resoluteness in fighting.

Though the etymology is unclear and open to dispute, there are empirically, two distinguishable groups of Mende and it is this point which interests me. Can we find any historical evidence which could help explain the differences - cultural, linguistic and geographical - between Kɔɔ and Kpa Mende?

Rodney, using historical accounts, assesses a tradition telling of the woman chief of the Manes, Macarico, arriving with her army on the Atlantic Coast, from Mali, and dividing her forces into three parts: one of these marched along the sea coast; the second parallel to the first, some forty-five miles away, while the third was equidistant on the right flank. Macarico died before reaching Sierra Leone, but her army continued until it defeated the Sapes.

This is an interesting account, particularly when we look at the present distribution of the Kpa Mende, on the north and west of the Kɔɔ, and on the south of the Temne (fig.4) Perhaps the Kpa were descendants of the arm of the Mane fighting forces which pushed through Kissi country in the East, to beyond Moyamba in the West.

Those leaders of the Mane invasion who reached the coast of Sierra Leone, were referred to as Mendi-Ko, which is consistent with the present Ko or Kɔɔ-Mende distribution in the South and East of the country. It is tempting to go from this, to suggest Kɔɔ and Kpa as resulting from Mane contact with Bullom and perhaps Kissi[1].

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[1] Mende is listed as a Mande language; Kissi is not. (T.P. Dalby, op.cit. (1969).

respectively. There are unquestionably linguistic cognates between Mende and Kissi. But no firm conclusions seem to be warranted at this stage.†

Rodney does not try to pursue this line of enquiry, but opines that the Mende originated in the South-east of present-day Sierra Leone, and that in the eighteenth century they attacked the Bulloms of Sherbro, and thereafter drove Northwards.[1] I was told that the remnants of the Mampas are probably the Sherbro and Bullom, and though this does not conflict with Rodney's interpretation, the sources - a few old men - cannot be considered as possessing convincing historical evidence. Such invaders as moved North from Sherbro, may have been the forebears of the present Kɔɔ Mende, and it is not impossible that a further phalanx of invaders approached Sierra Leone from east-of-south which would account both for Kɔɔ Mende belief in the east as their point of origin, as well as for the fact that there are dialectal variations between Kɔɔ and Kpa Mende.[2]

Specific details of the Mende occupation of their present territory is, as we see, lacking, but the point is that it is only comparatively recently that they have "settled" in the southern

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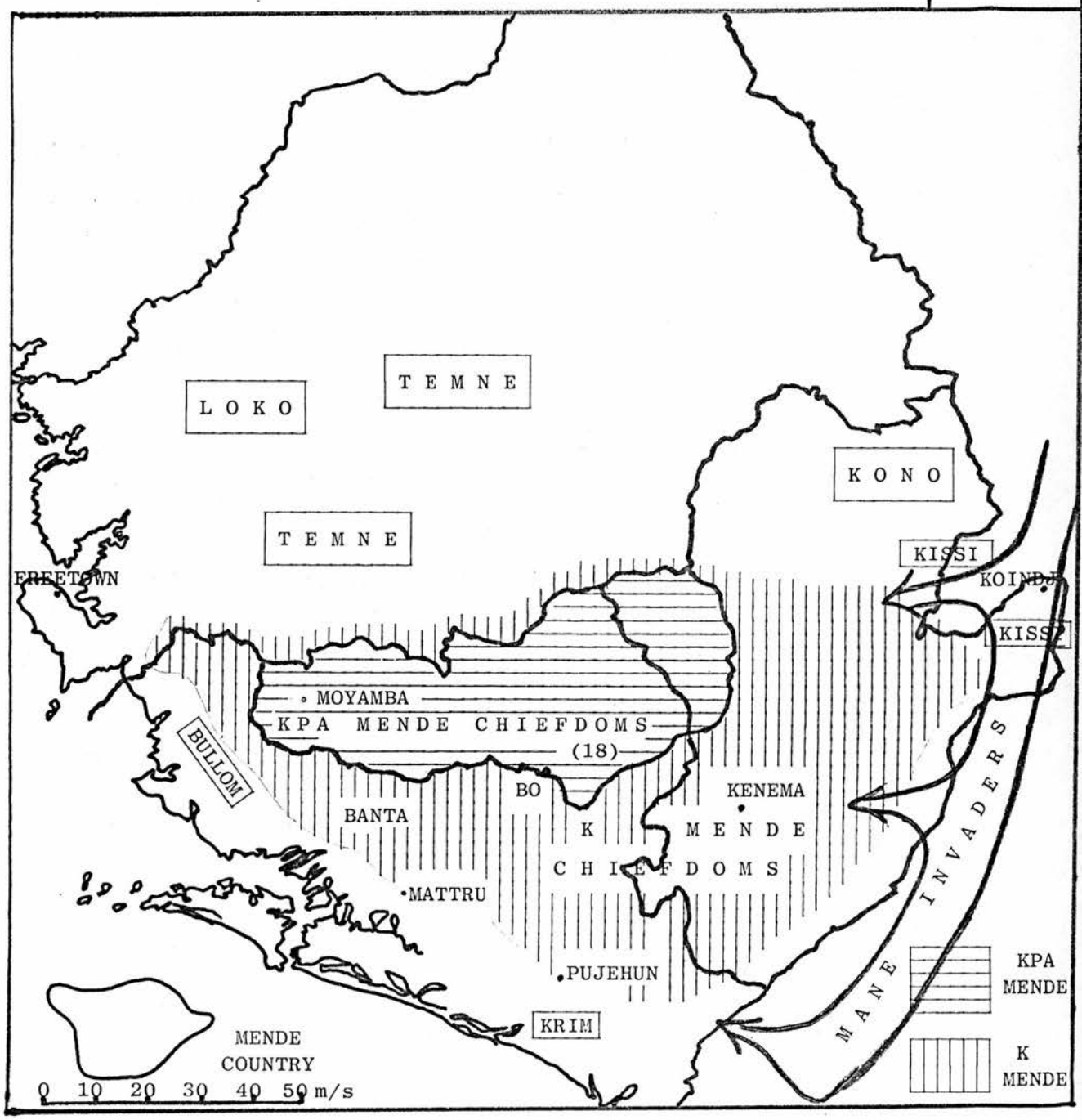
[1] Perhaps to link up with the other Kɔɔ. Meanwhile the Kpa may have been the line of the Mane invasion force furthest from the sea and moving West.

† Rodney does suggest that the Mende owe their origins to Mane contact with Bullom and Kissi, while the Loko represent the fusion of Mane and Temne, but see p.52, note 5.

[2] cf. Innes, G. (1969), Introduction.

THE MENDE IN SIERRA LEONE

FIG. 4



part of Sierra Leone - perhaps the late eighteenth century.[1] The Mende were involved in the slave trade,[2] which would have brought them into contact with other peoples, and seem to have been significantly influenced by Islam. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the British Colonial Representatives, civil and military, as well as European missionaries, were making increasing contact with the Mende.

To speak therefore, of "traditional" Mende social and religious organization or a "traditional" Mende "world view", is simply to use well worn tags whose nature must be clearly understood in order to avoid wild inaccuracy. As Rodney says:

> "in the face of this information [about demographic movement and slave trading] it is totally misleading to refer to African society at the end of the slave trade as 'traditional'. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to maintain that 'the social, political and economic life of West Africa became reorganized to produce one result, a steady flow of slaves for ships anchored along the coast'." [3]

Mende culture, such as it exists today in rural, isolated areas, is the offspring of Mende contact with different tribes, either through conquest or assimilation: it is more or less influenced by the presence of non-militant Islam, and it contains internal variations in different areas. I shall demonstrate the reality and effect of Mende eclecticism, but one must be aware of Mende

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[1] Rodney, W. op.cit., pp.50-51. Little, K.L. (1951) (notwithstanding Little's reference to "400 years since their arrival" p.26).

[2] "Coastal peoples raided inland to procure slaves, and then the interior people retaliated, starting a cycle of wars, which sometimes halted trade but ultimately fed the slave ships. Mendes, Konos and Vais were involved in these hostilities." Rodney, W. op.cit., pp.256-7.

[3] Rodney, W. op.cit., p.259, quoting Mannix and Cowley (1963).

antecedents and the comparatively shallow time-depth of the existence of what we now know as the Mende people, which is all I am concerned to indicate here.

Apart from historical evidence, there are a couple of interesting ideas of origin, held by Mende themselves. Some refer to the "Mampas" as the aboriginal inhabitants of Sierra Leone, but this name does not correspond with any ethnic group identified in the literature. In the Serabu and Mattru Jong areas of the present Southern Province, the Bantas, a refugee group of Temnes from Yoni country,[1] and the remnants of a group driven out by the Mendes, survive as prayer leaders in a few families[2] and at traditional locales. But another and more widely held tradition, claims that long before the Mampas and the Mendes arrived in the country, the area now occupied by the Mende, was peopled with autochthonous dwarfs who lived in caves and now-ruined dwellings. The Mende regard these people - tumbuisia[3] - as the real owners of the land, and consider themselves as having no more than the usufruct.

2-2 MENDE COUNTRY: GEOGRAPHY, DEMOGRAPHY, ECOLOGY

Sierra Leone, lying between 6°55' and 10° N, and 10°16' and 13°18' W, occupies an area of about 27,925 sq. miles, and has

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[1] Fyfe, C. (1962) p.6.

[2] That is, people of these areas call such prayer-leaders, Bantas, and differentiate them from the Mende proper.

[3] For further discussion, see Chapter 3, p.77 , infra.

been a sovereign state within the British Commonwealth since April 27th 1961. British Administration by rule of the African Company and later by a Crown colony of some 256 square miles, began in 1808, and the Protectorate of Sierra Leone extending over some 27,669 square miles, was established in 1896.[1]

With a coastline describing an arc of a little over two hundred miles, Sierra Leone is roughly circular in shape, of radius approximately one hundred miles.

The country enjoys two main seasons, the Dry, from late October to late May, and the Wet, from June to October, with the months from late March to late May being very changeable with thunderstorms and flash floods gradually increasing. The annual rainfall varies from under 80" in the North, to nearly 180" in the South and the Freetown Peninsular. The further inland and Eastwards one travels, the less the rainfall, and over the country as a whole more than 80% of the annual rainfall occurs between May and November, - July and August being the wettest months. The dry "harmattan" air blows southwards off the Sahara for about six to eight weeks during December and January, bringing low humidity and cool, dusty breezes. For the rest of the year, the atmosphere is humid and the mean temperatures around 80°F. Within Sierra Leone there is a good deal of variation in humidity, sunshine, and rain, depending on the terrain, distance from the coast, and time of year.[2]

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[1] See Fyfe, C. (1962), the standard History of Sierra Leone.

[2] Clarke, J.I. (1969) passim. esp. pp.20-23.

A large proportion of the terrain was formerly under prime forest, which in the past three generations particularly, has been greatly reduced by clearing for farming, and this "farm-bush" is the dominant vegetation-type of the Southern half of the country, the part inhabited by the Mende. In the northern reaches, the vegetation is of the savanna type. The remaining forest area is mainly in the south east, while along the rivers Rokel, Waanje, and Sewa particularly, riverain grasslands predominate. The four types - forest, farm-bush, grassland and savanna, are by no means discrete geographically, and one might more properly employ mixed categories to describe particular areas - Clarke suggests "forest and farm-bush"; "farm-bush and grass"; "farm bush and savanna"; "farm bush, grass and savanna"; "savanna and lophira savanna".[1]

Physically there are four distinguishable regions in Sierra Leone. If a line bisects the country from NNW to SSE, then on the East of this line are found the interior plateau and hill region, while on the West, the interior plains. The littoral is composed of the coastal swamp and Beach-Bar region, while the Freetown peninsular accounts for the fourth physical region (fig.5). Mende country varies in physical geography, covering part of the interior plateau, the plains and the coastal swamp. The plateau lies between 1400 and 2000 feet, while the plains vary from 100 to 750 feet. The southern littoral is rarely more than a few feet above sea level.

Sierra Leone contains within its borders, seventeen tribal groups, as well as the Creole population mostly centred on Freetown. Of these eighteen groups, all but two make up a little over a third

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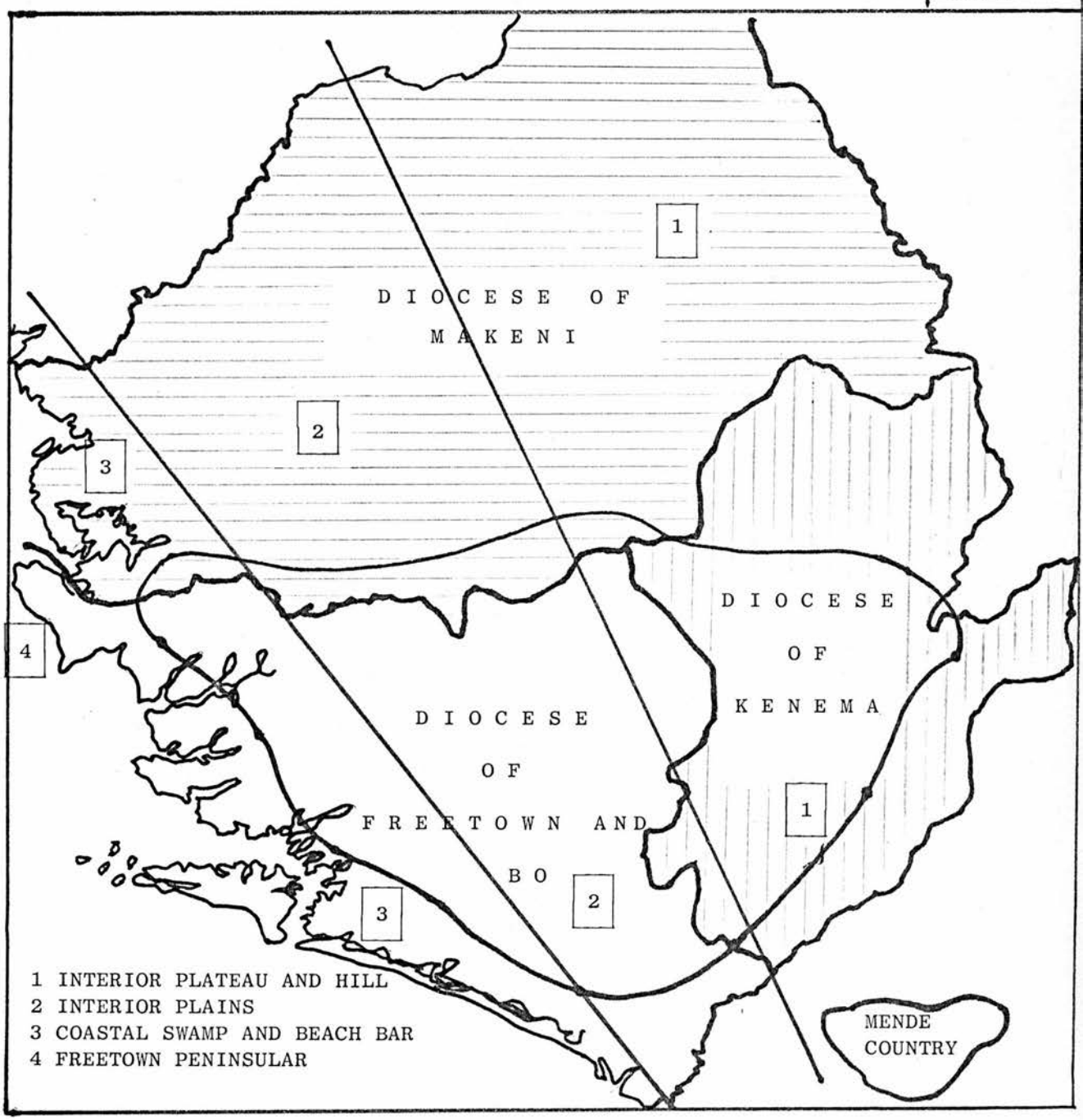
[1] Clarke, J.I. (1969) p.24.

PHYSICAL REGIONS AND CATHOLIC DIOCESES*

FIG.5



* DIOCESES AS IN 1974

(37.8%) while the remaining two are almost equal, slightly less than a third each; Mende 30.9% and Temne 29.8%.[1] The census of 1974-5 shows the total population as three millions, which puts the Mende at close to a million if the percentile distribution of tribes remains fairly static. The Mende themselves extend mostly South of a line between Freetown and Koindu (fig.4) and are predominantly scattered in villages between one-and-a-half and three miles apart, and of 70 to 250 inhabitants.[2] Early in the morning, at full dawn - 6.30 a.m. - they walk to their farms up to three miles or so away, where they remain until dark, most days of the year. There is little or no mechanization over the greater part of rural Mende country, though in the South the Mende of the Sewa and Waanje lowlands, have rice co-operatives which are beginning to catch on in some of the more accessible areas, though slowly. The Mende farmer uses hoe and machete ("cutlass"), and little else. There is some cash cropping of coffee, cocoa, and ginger, and more commonly for local use, pepper, groundnuts, beniseed and palm oil.[3] Palm kernels are sent for sale at the big towns, notably Bo, but most commonly only in small quantities sold by the local farmer to Lebanese traders.

[1]Clarke, J.I. (1969), p.36

Ethnic Composition	(per cent)		
Creole	1.9	Mandingo	2.3
Fula	3.1	Mende	30.9
Gallinas	0.1	Sherbro	3.4
Gola	0.2	Susu	3.1
Kissi	2.3	Temne	29.8
Kono	4.8	Vai	0.3
Koranko	3.7	Yalunka	0.7
Krim	0.4	No tribe	1.3
Kru	0.2	Others	0.2
Limba	8.4		
Loko	2.9	TOTAL	100.0

[2]Census (1965) Vol.I, p.39, Central Statistics Office, Freetown.

TABLE 8 (Total Population)

Size of Locality	Number of Localities
20,000+	2
10,000 to 20,000	5
5,000 to 10,000	11
4,000 to 5,000	7
3,000 to 4,000	11
2,000 to 3,000	24
1,500 to 2,000	20
1,000 to 1,500	86
500 to 1,000	312
200 to 500	1,643
100 to 200	3,070
Less than 100	13,379
	18,570

[3]Other local foodstuffs include cassava, potato-leaf, pawpaw, okra, citrus, bananas, yams, sweet potato.

2-3 COMMUNICATIONS AND MISSIONARY CONTACT

In this section more background data will be provided, to prepare for later elaboration of the arena of Missionary activity as it related and relates to the state of internal communications in the country.

Communications have improved radically in the last seventy years, and particularly in the period since Independence in which an arterial road system has been extending country-wide. At the beginning of the century[1] the building of the railway line from Freetown to Pendembu was undertaken, the 311 miles of track being surveyed and laid between 1895 and 1916. This undoubtedly opened up the country and provided the main means of long distance travel for government officials, missionaries, and various dignitaries. The coincidence of mission development can be seen if one looks at the map of the railway, and superimposes the Mission stations established in the early twentieth century (fig.6).

"Hammock roads" joined Chiefdom to Chiefdom, and a Chiefdom to its main section towns, while bush-paths criss-crossed the whole country, leading from village to village, and village to farm. Most hammock roads and all bush paths were unsuitable for bicycles and the cars of more recent years, though some horses were successfully used by the Catholic mission, even up to and just after the second World War. Apart from horses and hammocks, transport was on foot save for the few bicyclable miles, but from the end of the first World War roads were being built and motor vehicles

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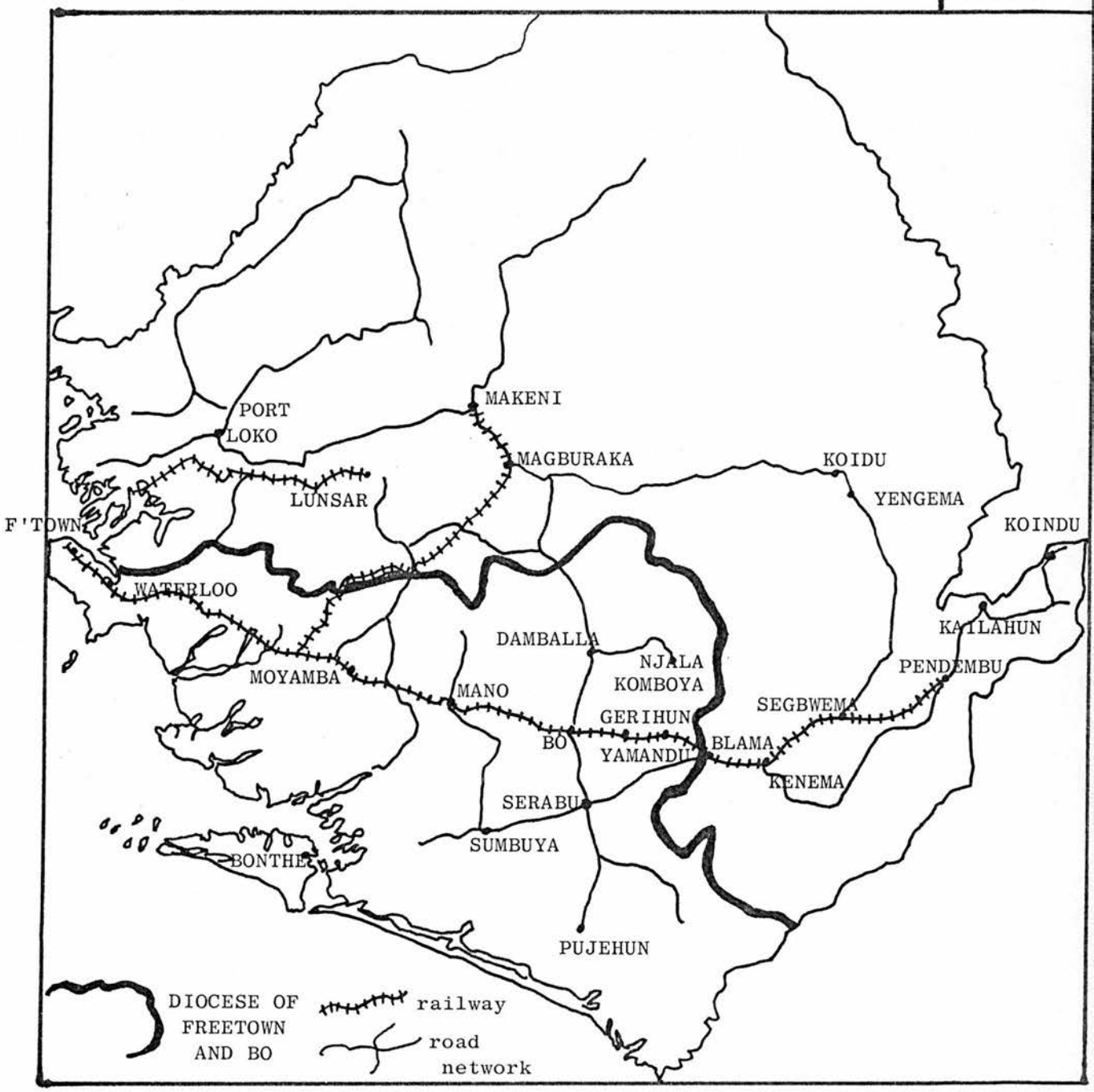
[1] The first 30 miles were actually opened in 1895. Utting, F.A.J. (1931).

ROADS, RAIL, AND CATHOLIC MISSION STATIONS

FIG. 6



imported in small quantities. In the '60s and '70s a great deal of road building was taking place, particularly as the railway finally closed in the early '70s, and motor vehicles were commonplace on the road linking main town centres, roads properly cambered and surfaced, as distinct from the more common laterite and "graded" roads (fig.6).

As regards this study, road- and rail-communications had two main effects. In the first place, there was a population shift - especially to the "towns" which grew up along the railway. Consequently the railway towns became the centres of Missionary activity to the interior. Secondly, with the purchase of motor transport, increasingly after the second World War, the missionaries became gradually less reliant on walking and on the trains, using their cars to reach the main "outstations" of their Mission, and walking from there to the smaller, more isolated villages (see Chapter 9, infra).

This gradual change from full time trekking to driving cars, coupled with the opening up of new motorable laterite roads, together with the creation of new Missions with educational establishments and hospitals in the larger towns, produced a new type of missionary work, and affected the pattern of Mende-Missionary relations.

The ordinary rank and file Mende of the rural areas, was very little influenced by improved communications at first, but for most, there was within a day's walk, access to large markets, cash economy and western influence; in fact most people rarely moved outside their own area unless they were educated and in search of

wage-earning employment, though slowly, outside influence was felt by villages, even if only in terms of enamel pots, tin pans, steel cutlasses and other small but useful western artefacts. The tracing of the breakdown of the Mende microcosm - first in the railway towns, and later, increasingly, in the rural areas, - is germane to this study, and by way of introduction we may note that the Second World War played a significant part in the breakdown, bringing as it did, military presence to Freetown, and incorporating thousands of Mende men either into the fighting corps or to ancillary trades and employment.

Outwardly, rural Mende life did not, at least until the outbreak of war, undergo rapid or very obvious changes, and though increasing education is imbuing students with a distaste for the land and manual work, subsistence farming still continues to be the mainstay of Mende life for the older, less well educated country people.

If the railway and road network were the biggest and least subtle agents of social change in what became urban centres, then education was arguably the greatest and most subtle agent of rural social change, a theme to which we shall return in the final chapters.

During the rainy season, and especially during the months of July, August and September, the rural areas of Mende country are waterlogged, the rain very heavy, and the people more confined to their villages than during the rest of the year - partly because the heavy work is done, the rice is growing well, and the scaring of birds, which is the most important job at this stage, is largely a job for the children. But precisely at this potentially opportune

time, the missionaries have least contact with the people. Travel is comparatively difficult of course, but more important is the fact, that May to September are the commonest months for missionary furlough, and the missionary personnel is consequently at its lowest. This represents a great change from the situation early in the century, when missionaries rarely took leave.

If the foregoing are some of the problems caused by communications, good and bad, the indisputable advantages must not be disregarded. Where communications are relatively poor and communities relatively stable, there is a great opportunity for the missionary to work with and for a small community, learning empathy with the people, leading to cooperation, and producing a context in which Mende and missionary can learn from each other while at the same time disclosing facets of their personal and social lives which would remain hidden simply on the basis of occasional contact: this is the ambience in which the anthropologist's "participant observation" can bear fruit. In the era, before growing rail- and road-transport systems, the lives of missionaries may be seen to have been lived close to the local people, both physically and in terms of cooperation. The missionary tended to live in houses built of locally available materials in local designs, eating local foodstuffs, and living out his life very much in view of the local people. By comparison, since the advent of motor transport, improved communications, and the movement of labour force, building materials from Europe have been much more easily available, Mission houses more self contained and European in style, as well as more distant from the hub of the local village - and missionaries

generally more self-sufficient in terms of transport, food and accommodation, and consequently less dependent on their Mende hosts. These statements will be illustrated later; sufficient at this stage to emphasise that between 1864 and 1975 there were important changes in the lifestyle of the missionary, quite apart from the missionary message and methods of implementation, and that to understand the development of Mende-Missionary relations, the significance and ramifications of improved communications in Mende country, and indeed between Europe and Africa, are important and far-reaching.

Though theoretically easier to establish deep-rooted contact at the level of the isolated village rather than in large conurbations composed of different ethnic groups, and though the contact between Mende and missionary in rural areas, and the latter's involvement with local life, has in some cases resulted in a high level of cooperation and no mean achievement, nevertheless to a great extent patterns of communication and historical developments within Sierra Leone, dictated the pattern and locale of missionary entrenchment and expansion far more than the simple implementation of the Biblical injunction to "Go, teach all nations" irrespective of place, ethnic group or environment. In other words, instead of dispersing throughout Sierra Leone or throughout Mende country to fulfil their evangelical undertakings, the missionaries, due to a blend of the desirable and the expedient, undertook a different type of infiltration into the country, which had the effect of creating as much movement of Mende away from their villages and accustomed background, as it created missionary immersion in

"traditional" Mende social life. The missionary was thus faced with something of a problem - of which he was very much aware. He was working in an established central Mission where there was some continuity and visible stability in terms of exposure to the local people, buildings and institutions such as schools, baptism classes and the rest. And he was also trying to contact and maintain contact with people in the outlying villages. He thus had to "spread" himself over two different types of organization and work, while the Mende became aware of the tension between the demands of the central mission and those of the outstations. How both groups reacted to these problems, and the effect of such reaction on the development of policy, is a further important part of this analysis.

A glance at the map of Sierra Leone (fig.6) shows the railway running from Freetown to Pendembu, roughly from West to East. This provided access to the very heart of Mende country, while easy communication by sea from Freetown to Bonthe, Sherbro Island, provided access from the South and West. The "Mendi Mission" (UBC) of 1841 established a post at Shenge, but the Catholic Mission, moving within Sierra Leone[1] from its base at Freetown, tended to follow the railway line and to move tentatively inland from Bonthe in the South.

Thus by sea and rail, Mende country was effectively encircled by communications links which the Missionaries used, and

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[1] The Catholic Mission at Freetown, established foundations at Rio Pongo in the North, Monrovia in the South East, and elsewhere outside Sierra Leone prior to 1896 when the boundaries were fixed. Within Sierra Leone it established a Mission at Bonthe in the 1890s.

this is one reason why the object of this study is the Mende as a whole and the Catholic Mission as a whole. Other Missions have done much work in Mende country and indeed preceded the Catholics in the nineteenth century. Likewise, the Catholic Mission extended to Temne country and among other tribal groups of Sierra Leone. But the Catholic Mission in Mende country is a unit in terms of organization, deployment and aims, and there are sufficient mission stations in towns and rural areas, for us to be able to consider the Mende people as a group, to whom the missionaries went and among whom they have worked for a century.

The Mende people distinguish the Kɔɔ and the Kpa, but the linguistic and cultural differences are not sufficient to prevent mutual intelligibility or social interaction between the two groups, and missions are established without respect to intra-tribal distinctions: indeed the majority of missionaries are unaware of the Kɔɔ/Kpa distinction as such.

The geographical limitation of this study, is simply the boundary of the Diocese of Freetown and Bo, established in 1950. This diocese covers Mende country and the South but not Temne country nor Eastern Mende country, nor Kissi and Kono country in the Eastern Province. The diocese of Freetown and Bo in fact covers Freetown and the Peninsula, together with the Southern Provincial Administrative area, though my fieldwork took me to those parts of Mende country which lie outside the Diocesan boundaries. (fig.6).

To complete this overview of Sierra Leone and the Mende people, but without unduly preempting later discussion, the topic of

Mende religion or cosmology, and Mende "Secret Societies", will be briefly adumbrated.

2-4 MENDE RELIGION AND THE CATHOLIC MISSIONARIES

The social and religious organization of the Mende people - certainly in rural areas, less now in the urban agglomerations - is articulated to a very significant extent, through so-called Secret Societies, of which Poro*, Sande, and Wunde are perhaps the most well-known and well represented in the literature. But there are more than a dozen other "societies" in Mende country. I feel that these groupings and their socio-religious significance can only be understood if they are properly contextualized against a background of Mende life as a whole. Little[1] has attempted to relate Poro to politics, religion and economics, for example, but in his monograph devotes less than forty pages to "Religion and Medicine" and "the Cultural Role of the Poro and other Societies".[2] I propose a more thorough and integrated holistic account of the place of Societies in Mende life. This is necessary to the present work since, unless the wider context and institutionalization of Mende Societies is understood, we will not be able to explicate Mende-Missionary relations satisfactorily: and with such an understanding, some of the tensions in these Mende-Missionary relations, begin to make much more sense. The account will follow, in Chapter Three and thereafter.

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[1] Little K.L. (1951). Also (1947), (1948a), (1948b), (1949), (1966).

[2] Little, K.L. (1951) pp.216-253. I use the term "Secret Societies" simply because it is by now canonized in the literature. Later I will discuss its usefulness.

* I use the common orthography here; in later chapters I shall employ the phonetic orthography.

Here we may note that one of the most important confrontations between the Mende and the Catholic missionaries, centred on the influence of the Secret Societies. Historically, Catholics were extremely sceptical of them, and Roman documents banned Catholic membership of proscribed European societies on pain of excommunication.[1] The precise nature of Mende Societies was not originally, and, I submit, has never been subsequently, sufficiently understood by Catholic missionaries as a whole - with individual exceptions, - though there were plenty of rumours and circumstantial evidence, on which impressions were built. Missionary ignorance - often self confessed - about such societies, produced a kind of fear or suspicion in the face of their wide-ranging activity and

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[1] The Free Masons were first condemned by Pope Clement XII in the Bull "In Eminenti" confirmed by that of Pope Benedict XIV "Providas" (1751).

The origins of Masonry are impeccable, and masonic guilds were not esoteric, though the sharing of subversive secrets was attributed to them. Masonry itself divided into a "regular" and an "irregular" branch, the former always condemning the aberrations of the latter, which had spread throughout Europe by the eighteenth century and was responsible for anti-clericalism in France's Third Republic. In the condemnation of 1751, the secrecy and not doctrinal heterodoxy was the reason cited for Masonry's proscription. In the Roman Catholic "Code of Canon Law", Canon 684 reads (in translation)

> "Let the faithful avoid secret societies, and those which are condemned or seditious, or which try to evade legitimate supervision by the Church"

and a commentary states that "No Society is recognised by the Church unless it has been either erected by the competent ecclesiastical authority, or at least approved by it". Woywood, S. (1926) Vol.1,p.303.

Missionaries to the Mende people, aware of the official attitude of the Church to Masonry, other secret societies, and identifying Mende "societies" with those proscribed by the Church, were faced with quite a problem. cf. Rahner, K. et al., Editors, (1968) Vol.2, "Free Masonry".

influence, and resulted in a - to the Mende - vindictive and arbitrary proscription, motivated by evangelizing zeal no doubt, but having roots in Papal statements and a European climate of Catholic opinion.

Some missionary stand had of necessity to be adopted towards the Societies, which seemed to the missionaries to play such a dominant social role and wield such power and authority in a fashion apparently incompatible with Christianity. It would seem a priori that any of three possible attitudes could be taken - and we shall see that at one time or another, all three have been espoused: ban and fight the Societies, hoping thereby to "prove" conclusively and once for all, that they were wrong-headed, immoral, or irrelevant for Christians; simply ban Christians from membership but do not actively fight the Societies; or disregard the Societies altogether, on the assumption either that they would naturally atrophy with the impact of education and social development, or that since foreign missionaries did not know sufficient to deal satisfactorily with the Societies, the proper course of action was to put the responsibility on to the shoulders of future indigenous clergy.

The issue of Mende Secret Societies and some of its important ramifications is very important but only one problem relating to the implantation of Christianity. Less central to the main theme is the relationship between Catholic and other Christian missionaries, between Catholicism and Islam, and the effects of such relations on the Mende themselves. This is a study of the Mende people which takes as its point of departure, Catholic missionaries; these latter affected the former by their presence

and by their policy. But missionaries did not simply relate to the Mende alone: and however they related to other missionaries, to Muslims, and indeed to the Colonial Government, was to some degree bound to affect Mende understanding and expectations of the missionary.

By the time of the "Second Spring" of Catholic Missionary endeavour in Sierra Leone, other Christian missionary bodies had been active in the country for forty years.[1] This presence, inter alia, undoubtedly affected Catholic missionary deployment and organization, and the historical and doctrinal differences between Christian denominations, together with ideological stances adopted in Sierra Leone, stamped the nineteenth and early twentieth century relationships between Roman Catholics and other Christians, with the brand of hostility, suspicion and rivalry. The Bishop of Philadelphia and Vicar Apostolic of the Two Guineas, Bishop Barron, addressed Libermann, whose missionaries were to go to West Africa:

> "The Methodists have tried to discredit us before the natives, but without success. On the contrary after an examination . . . these calumnies have been traced to the Methodists' house. The King and the Chiefs show a great deal of attachment towards us. And the Protestant preachers have made themselves very odious by their conduct . . . When we go, it will be necessary for us to choose places as far away from these missionaries as possible. May God guide us! . . . Apart from the ordinary enemies opposed to Catholic missionaries, we will have plenty of adversaries from the Protestant missionaries. But we will always have the protection of the English Government . . . "[2]

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[1] The Second Spring of Catholic activity, starts with de Bresillac in 1859. The CMS of London had established the first Protestant mission in Sierra Leone in 1816, though a Wesleyan, Rev. George Warren, was in Sierra Leone in 1811 - Utting, F.A.J. (1931).

[2] N.D. C.S.Sp.(Cabon) V. pp.46-48.

However missionaries may be judged now, by dispassionate criteria, we can at least see the live issue put before them even before they sailed for Africa. The atmosphere of the time could only engender sectarianism and mutual misinterpretation and prejudice: themes which are important when we consider Catholic missionary techniques of evangelization.

Sierra Leone had, by the nineteenth century, the reputation of being a difficult place to work, though in the seventeenth century the Jesuits and Capuchins hardly thought so. The soubriquet "The White man's grave" originally applied to the Gambia and thence to a large part of West Africa, became associated particularly with Sierra Leone,[1] and seemed to be gruesomely apt, since so many missionaries died there between 1816 and the early twentieth century.

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[1] Rankin, F.H. (1836).

CHAPTER THREE:

NGEWƆ, MANKIND, 'AND SPIRITUAL AGENCIES

CHAPTER THREE:

NGEWƆ, MANKIND, AND SPIRITUAL AGENCIES

3-1 INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the effects of missionary endeavour in Mende country, and the reaction of Mende people to European clergy and their message, it is important to appreciate indigenous "social" and "religious" behaviour in their context. This demands what Mary Douglas sees as

> "an ecological approach in which the structure of ideas and of society, the mode of gaining a livelihood and the domestic architecture are interpreted as a single interacting whole in which no one element can be said to determine the other." [1]

This is a tall order but a laudable aim, since by endeavouring to follow these lines of approach, we may hope to capture some of the "flavour" of Mende life, apply the ethnographic data in more than a simply descriptive way, and lay the foundations for an informed appraisal of missionary activity. The explication and interpretation offered here is an attempt at a holistic account of Mende life, but not an exhaustive one: it cannot be exhaustive due to the vast data which would be required, as well as to my own ignorance of many things; and it cannot but be holistic, else it loses all claim to be balanced.

From what has already been said about some pertinent historical factors, it will not be unduly surprising to discover in Mende cosmological notions, an eclecticism developed and refined

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[1] Douglas, M. (1972) pp.513-21.

over at least the past three centuries. Indeed I shall argue that the Mende genius is manifested in the synthesis to be found between elements of Islamic culture and religion, European civilization, and the African cultures which figure in the history and settlement of the Mende people. Moreover, since the Mende was already a proficient "cultural chemist", some elements of the Christian message might be easily assimilated and others just as easily overlooked, discarded or rejected, and Mende adaptation to Christianity was consequently more subtle and less predictable than missionaries could have envisaged, and changing all the time in reaction not simply to missionary presence, but to the emergence of new goals.[1]

To test these, and other hypotheses, it is necessary to look in some detail, at an analysis of Mende belief and thought, various aspects of which have received attention from a number of respected students of Mende culture. But I need here to try and push previous analyses further, and will suggest a framework or model which accounts for more of the data than any of which I am aware.

There is a danger in proceeding in this fashion: that the "model" presented may smack of a static system and imply a sterile analysis far removed from the real processes of daily life among the Mende. To a point it must be admitted that such a model is potentially dangerous: at this stage I deliberately limit myself to an account of an idealized system as it obtained generally, perhaps two generations ago. However, though two generations have seen changes,

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[1] Horton, R. (1960) pp.201-225.

many parts of Mende country are still dominated by a somewhat residual system; and the period of missionary contact with the up-country Mende, goes back almost exactly to the time when the system I describe, was widespread. Consequently my presentation is in the ethnographic present and my model somewhat formalized, but as I shall show, the model is to a significant extent extrapolated from the ethnographic data rather than being a pure imposition from without. The ecological or holistic approach undertaken provided the ethnographic data, and with the help of certain key concepts, (i.e. concepts of fundamental importance to the Mende themselves), it was possible to formulate a kind of ethnographic "deep structure" against which empirical "utterances",[1] in the form of transactions, sacrifices, dances, individual and group behaviour, could be understood. (cf. Chapter 6.)

In a speech act, there are constraints and alternatives to influence the speaker, yet he retains a certain creativity and freedom of choice in forming utterances. The utterances thus formed, may be adjudged acceptable or non acceptable by interlocutors or independent judges, according to a variety of standards relating to grammaticality, complexity, context and so on. So it is in the sphere of behaviour: the model I present must allow for individual choice, certain constraints, and the possibility of a variety of sanctions. The Mende is no more consciously aware of formal choices, constraints, or acceptability in relation to daily behaviour, than he

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[1] For the analogy with Transformational Grammar ("deep" and "surface" structure) see Lyons, (1969) p.247. Chomsky, (1957) (1966).

is conscious of grammatical rules: nor is he less so. At times he will act with deliberateness and provision; at others he appears to act intuitively. Sometimes a wide range of opinions will be elicited to justify or explain an item of behaviour; at others there may be general consensus or equally general ignorance on the part of informants. This is not an abnormal state of affairs, but the universal condition. To imagine that other cultures are more exotic and therefore more likely for some reason, to be "extreme" - extremely irrational or extremely rational; extremely simple or extremely complex; extremely rich or extremely poor in symbolism, ritual or esoterica - is to prejudice one's case. Imaginings of this kind, have as far as possible here, been controlled.

The literature[1] speaks of Mende belief in God,* but stresses that the distance maintained by the Supreme Being necessitates man's interacting with less distant entities. So man and God are apparently at opposite poles, and intermediate or mediating spirits are located somewhere in between. This kind of two dimensional view - possibly a subjective interpretation on my part, but nevertheless pervading - seems to have inhibited an understanding of the dynamic and phenomenological in Mende life. It must be possible to present an integrated picture of that life which, while obviously incomplete, is not

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[1] See Bibliography, especially Sawyerr, H. (1970); Harris, W.T. and Sawyerr, H. (1968); Little, K.L. (1967).

* I use "God" here in preference to Lienhardt's "Divinity", or a vernacular word, basically for simplicity. "Divinity" has a rather impersonal quality in the mind of some: Ngewɔ has yet to be explained (p.88, sqq.). "God" is here used as the supreme-being and creator of a monotheistic universe, personalized, and with some anthropomorphic attributes, which will be discussed later, p.90f but are doubtfully aboriginal. But the vernacular term Ngewɔ will be used to distinguish this use of "God" from the missionary use of God.

necessarily inchoate; so that the world presented by means of ethnographic data is not entirely alien to that inhabited by the Mende. The undertaking is admittedly ambitious, but anything less would be unforgiveably distorted.

The standard work on the Mende is justly valued and contains a mine of information, yet as a general ethnographic monograph, it naturally has its own limitations and scope, as the author acknowledges.[1] The thrust of this study, will be to concentrate on those aspects of Mende life which I will describe as religious, and show how their social forms are articulated.

In brief, the argument will run thus: God, though remote from mankind in ordinary circumstances and on a conscious level, is nevertheless believed to exercise far more than a general benevolence towards the created world. His interest extends to all men and women, living and dead, as they pass from the transient phase of physical "existence" to a more real and permanent mode, independent of physical bodies yet in some ways a continuation and completion of corporeal life. God exercises at least passive control over all creation, including such spirits as never had the limitations of corporeal form.[2]

Ancestors, or spirits of (some of) the dead, share some of their capacities with the living, with power of protection or encouragement derived from the ultimate source of all power, Ngewɔ.

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[1] Little, K.L. (1967) p.7.

[2] This can of course include spirits who, though never human, may assume human form in their manifestations. Such as tingɔi, njaloi and others.

Ancestors however, may also execute negative sanctions upon the living who neglect or offend them. Man is thus less powerful than ancestors, whom he has no power to coerce or sanction. The living are in the process of becoming ancestors in the sense that after death they will be translated to a continued existence in which they will enjoy prerogatives over the living.

During life, men and women are progressively socialized into groups and imbued with collective social and moral values upheld by ancestors and other sanctions. Alone, a person is in potential danger, either to himself or as a threat to others; within a properly constituted group he is safe, sharing the aspirations and behaviour of the group. However, self interest is a powerful motivation and individuals are likely from time to time, to attempt to evade their social responsibilities in favour of personal prestige, preference or profit. If successful, the rewards are presumably worth the risk, yet many of life's daily problems are ex post facto attributed to overweening individuality, and the individualist stands to lose a great deal if his or her action can be shown to have caused sickness, death, ill-luck and so on, within the group. Hence the individual and the group are perpetually in tension - ideologically if not physically - with individuals aspiring to entrepreneurial or manipulative roles, yet being bound by group standards and expectations. There is thus interdependence and competition between the group and its constituents.

Physical sickness which is a fact of Mende life, threatens the community as a whole, and characteristically threatens individuals at the life-crises of birth, parturition, and death. Ngewɔ is

remote from day to day affairs, and people make other provisions for the resolution of these crises, provisions canonized by explicit or implicit reference to Ngewɔ as their source. The cosmos is a powerful place, and within it there flourish physical and spiritual powers. It seems clear that such powers have no significance, except in terms of humanity - individually or collectively. Ngewɔ is thought to be their author, and they have a range of applicability which, though bewilderingly wide at first sight, is by no means arbitrary and with a minimum of redundance. Documentation of these notions will follow shortly.

The living are vulnerable in their bodies, their spirits and their destiny; pure spirit is not vulnerable. Consonant with this, the Mende recognize that Ngewɔ has made provision for them in a variety of ways. In other words, man's vulnerability is offset to some degree by his access to various sources of power, and since power derives ultimately from Ngewɔ, so man can appreciate that his vulnerability may be compensated for, and that there is scope for his initiative and manipulative ability. In some measure, every Mende has access to such power, either on his own initiative through institutionalized means, or by virtue of the action of another, seeking his protection. Thus adults may obtain power on behalf of their children, to protect them. It seems that this attitude explains why the Mende are not fatalists when prima facie one would expect them to be: life is hard, the selfish and unscrupulous seem to succeed, at the expense of the simple hard working people, Ngewɔ is far away and rarely intervenes . . . Yet there are many doors which lead ultimately to Ngewɔ or to a manifestation of his power. So long as even one remains to be tried, there is cause for hope and not for fatalism.

There is a feeling, a conviction of choice and freedom, common to the Mende. While he continues to be convinced both of the possibility of tapping yet more power, and of the fact that in the long term Ngewɔ will see the good vindicated, then the Mende will not give up: the difficulties of life are not greater than the means available to deal with them.

What then, are these means? What are the sources of power and influence available to the Mende? One of the puzzles left by previous accounts of the Mende has been this: how does one derive an integrated picture of Mende culture, belief and thought? The dominant and most interesting and controversial issues, to judge from the ethnography, are "Secret Societies", "Medicine", and the plethora of spiritual agents. No thorough analysis and explication of Mende belief and thought, has shown what relationship exists between these three elements, if indeed a relationship does exist. We do not know what the Mende sees as the logic of the non-empirical world, and though some recent research[1] has focused on "Secret Societies" and "Medicine", it seems unnecessarily speculative and decontextualized. In the following chapters I shall explain this assertion.

My problem can be stated thus: if Ngewɔ is acknowledged as Creator, dispenser of life and ultimate controller of destiny and the working of the cosmos, yet is at the same time beyond the ambit of mankind, how does the Mende cope with the vicissitudes of life and accept that there is an underlying order and predictability in the universe? How does Ngewɔ communicate with mankind and how in turn

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[1] Jędrej, M.C. (1974) (1976).

does mankind interpret and maintain such communications? An immediate problem the ethnographer faces in Mende country, is concerned with the order attributed by the Mende to the universe, and the classification he makes of phenomena and reality. Man acquires technical skills and expertise to help in problem-solving, planning and provision for the future, yet there are many areas of life where such is simply insufficient: crops may still fail, villages burn down, children die; enemies are maleficent, and many dangers cannot be obviated by simple technical or empirical means. It is in cases such as these that Mende appeal to non-empirical techniques whose effectiveness transcends individual expertise. In particular instances the Mende will know if and what techniques of this kind are available, and his knowledge provides him with a means of action suited to context, resources, or the gravity of the situation.

Between mankind and Ngewɔ there exists the rest of creation, including spirits, natural forces and loci of Ngewɔ's power. The Mende sees this world as providing opportunities for success, and punishment for excess. In short, the universe contains the potential for the harmonious integration of society, and the legitimate fulfilment of individual aspirations, but equally the potential for social disintegration and individual wickedness.

The tensions and opportunities existing on the social level, reflect, or are a reflection of, those existing in the world which one is tempted to label supernatural. To the Mende however, there is no such clear polarity: at most there is a qualitative difference between Ngewɔ and man, but not between man and the rest of creation. That is,

man belongs in the realm of creation alongside spirits, natural objects, and the loci of Ngewɔ's power. And though certain spirits are considered as in some sense "nearer" to Ngewɔ than man, and many natural objects are not directly relevant to man's purpose in life, there is nevertheless believed to be a oneness in nature, such that everything which exists apart from Ngewɔ is a reflection of Ngewɔ and potentially important in man's playing out of his role in nature. I shall therefore not talk of supernatural agents, nor of supernatural power, but of spirits and "Power".[1]

By spirits I intend both those entities which once informed physical bodies but now exist after physical death, (ancestral spirits); those entities created by Ngewɔ independent of physical, human bodies, though sometimes able to assume human or near-human form (non-ancestral spirits); and spirits which I designate as anomalous.

By "Power" is meant a dynamism or creative or destructive element transcending human capacities and being a manifestation of the Supreme Being, either localized in an object or place, or diffused throughout a group, explicitly or implicitly acknowledged as deriving from Ngewɔ.

Man's access to, or communication with Ngewɔ is basically maintained through his relationship either to spirits or to Power, or, where these two come together, to formally constituted and legitimated social groups, some but not all of which have been known heretofore as Secret Societies.

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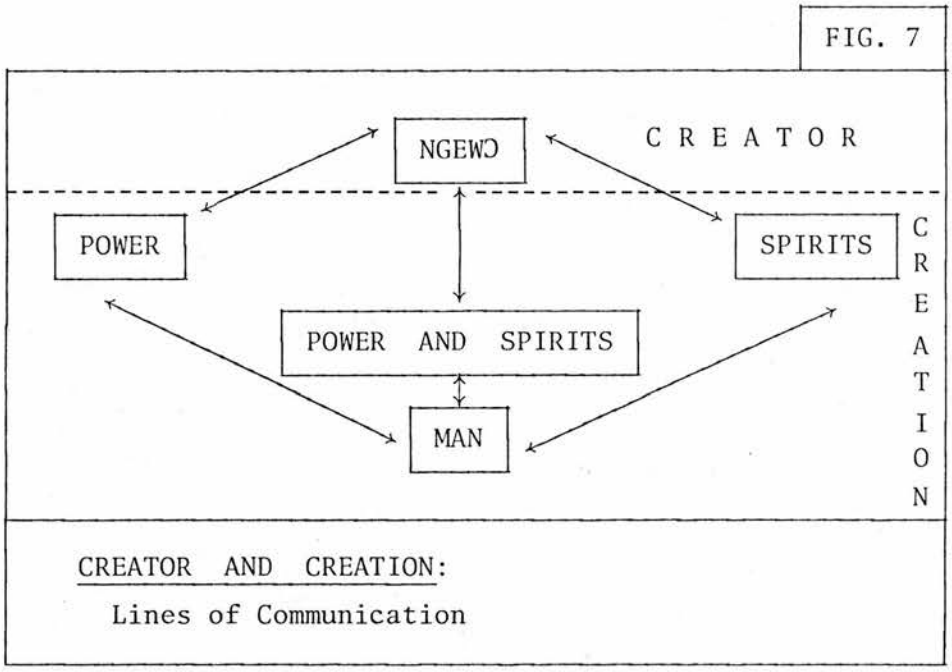
[1] To talk of the "supernatural" implies some contrast with the "natural", but this classification of the cosmos does not elucidate Mende concepts. The Mende see the spirit world as natural - as part of the created world in which he also exists. See Reinhardt, L.R. (1973) p.1; and Little, K.L. (1967) p.217, ". . . The Mende adaptation . . . involves a positive acceptance of the world or 'universe' as it is found." (my emphasis.)

The main focus of this Chapter, will be the place and attributes of Ngewɔ and spirits in Mende life. Chapter four will then analyse the notion and sphere of action of "Power", while Chapter five will show how "Power" and select spirits may be invoked together by different groups for different specific purposes. At this stage we can begin to develop a framework for an understanding of Mende behaviour relating to non technical and metaphysical problems.

FIG. 7



This is of course a simplified, formalized model: as we begin to examine its constituent parts in greater detail, we shall find inconsistencies, contradictory explanations and some lack of interest on the part of Mende informants. After assessing evidence and the statements and rationalizations of individuals, I will be

interested in describing what I consider to be collective representations, not simply individual behaviour.

3-2 THE SUPREME BEING

3-2.1 Ngewɔ

It is unnecessary to repeat here the excellent ethnography presented by others:[1] rather, summarizing the major points of agreement, my argument will proceed by way of a novel synthesis to illuminate the analysis of Mende and missionary relations.

To attempt to list the attributes of the Supreme Being, as they are putatively discerned by a community, may produce a tendentious and sterile typology, hardly likely to be of much explanatory value. It would seem more productive to look, not for attributes of Ngewɔ in an analytic framework, since Ngewɔ is held to transcend such conceptual control anyway, but at the observable behaviour of the community of believers. One may deduce the presence or absence of attitudes of filial piety, awe, terror or personal involvement with the Supreme Being, among Mende and missionaries in turn, and attempt second-order deductions about the possibility of change in belief or action, mutual sympathy and understanding, and so on. Most people have fuzzy notions about Ngewɔ, which are not easily expressed spontaneously. Assent to explicit propositions is not a feature of Mende belief, and the traditional belief-system or religion is compelling without being

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[1] Little, K.L. (1967) pp.217-18.
Sawyerr, H. (1970) pp.62-94.
Harris, W.F. and Sawyerr, H. (1968) passim.

dogmatic. The fact that Ngewɔ made everything and is good but inscrutable, provides the framework of Mende belief. Perhaps "acceptance" of an ordered universe, rather than "belief" or "assent", comes closer to the reality of everyday experience.

The common word for the Supreme Being is Ngewɔ - a word whose etymology is unclear.[1] Surely the most frequent Mende reference to Ngewɔ is the phrase Kaye ii Ngewɔ ma, uttered many times daily, and meaning literally "confession - is not - Ngewɔ - on", hence "Ngewɔ has no reason to have to justify anything". What is, is, and must be right since Ngewɔ made it so, or at least allowed it to be so. This summarizes Mende attitudes to daily life. As one old man, claiming to be a Christian but with no formal catechesis, said: "I do not say Kaye ii Ngewɔ ma idly. I say it after a hard working day, going to sleep. I mean it: "there is no blame on Ngewɔ". Whatever happens, good or bad, planned or not, still you have to say "Ngewɔ thank-you"." And another attitude; "The people always know that Ngewɔ is 'up'. It is their belief that Ngewɔ is looking after them."

The Mende however, does not aspire to, and indeed finds it difficult to conceive of man's having a dynamic relationship with Ngewɔ. Each is of a totally different order, man may "know about Ngewɔ but cannot 'know Ngewɔ'" since there are no means of direct reciprocal communication. The nearest possible is when, faced with dire calamity, a person implores Ngewɔ directly to come between him and danger: even when the danger is averted, the communication is

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[1] Sawyerr, H.(1970) p.68ff.

by virtue of Ngewɔ having intervened, not by virtue of any personal or direct revelation. And for Mende unaffected by Islam or Christianity, the reciprocal element of communication seems to have been missing, since informants maintained that if a man did something shameful (ngufengɔ) and thought he might be discovered, he would pray to Ngewɔ "so that he would not be found out or caught. He will not say 'O Ngewɔ I am very sorry', but 'O Ngewɔ let them not find out'", the belief being that Ngewɔ is not as implacable or vengeful as one's fellow men.

Because of the normally accidental, indirect nature of man's commerce with Ngewɔ, the belief in his physical remoteness is reinforced, to leave the Mende with no appreciation of a concerned, paternal figure, or even an anthropomorphic one - there seems an almost complete lack of anthropomorphic characterization of Ngewɔ, a fact consistent with his remoteness from everyday life.[1] If there is any trace at all of anthropomorphism it can perhaps be found in the analogy, somewhat tenuously held between the (Paramount) Chief and Ngewɔ, but rather than Ngewɔ being thought of as "like the Chief" in some respect, Ngewɔ has priority and, if anything, the Mende have certain expectations of the Chief because in some respects he may be seen as "like Ngewɔ". Yet there appears no trace of Divine Chiefship, nor does the Chief have any attributes which are strictly those of Ngewɔ. This again is perhaps partly accounted for, by the remoteness of Ngewɔ. The Chief is near to his people, even though physically separated from them to some degree by virtue of the dignity of his

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[1] Islam and Christianity have undoubtedly invested Mende ideas of the Supreme Being with anthropomorphic attributes such as Judge or Loving Father, etc.

office. He is however, highly esteemed the more he listens to the people and mixes with them as Chief. Ngewɔ is almost the antithesis of this, and consequently it is not surprising that there is only a minimum of identification between Ngewɔ and the Chief.

But the Chief may be said to be "like Ngewɔ" inasmuch as the Chief should be as disinterested, in the pursuit and sponsoring of truth and rectitude, as Ngewɔ is par excellence. Thus one can refer to Ngewɔ as mu maha wai - "our great Chief" - the epitome of the virtues expected of a local mahei or Chief. But the emphasis here in the phrase, maha wai as applied to Ngewɔ seems decidedly on the fact of the sovereignty of Ngewɔ, rather than on his known personality as Chief.

The Chief as judicial authority, is physically and emotionally removed from the plaintiff and defendant, ideally impassive, yet in providing sanctuary he is indulgent and accessible. Ngewɔ is thought to embody such qualities on a supra-social level and to be accessible and indulgent to those who seek sanctuary in extreme cases. Yet on a day to day basis, Ngewɔ works through a variety of executors, notably spirits, official interpreters such as fortune-tellers, medicine men and prophets latterly, or through the dispensation of his characteristic power. To think of Ngewɔ simply as "like the Chief" is therefore dangerous and distorting, because it smacks of reductionism, and the overwhelming fact about Ngewɔ, namely his transcendence, may be more easily maintained and conceptualized if we see the secular Chief as participating to some degree in the attributes of Ngewɔ in a purely social context. Likewise, where Christians traditionally think of God as a "loving Father", "Just Judge", and so on, it seems to me that

such a conceptualization is only possible to maintain within the framework of a belief system which predicates a benevolent God with whom mankind is invited to enjoy a developing, salvific relationship. Consequently, many ethnocentric ideas of God should not be looked for in the Mende belief and thought, and any parallels which might be adduced must be somewhat suspect.[1]

There is then, no spontaneity or real reciprocity in the relations between Mende and Ngewɔ: true there is a kind of obedience at times and a general reverential respect; but a Being who only rarely impinges on human affairs, can be no more than shadowy and little known. Critically, there is no developing relationship envisaged by man, between him and Ngewɔ. Communication is on a rather ad hoc basis and instrumental rather than expressive in character. Hence the attribution Ngewɔ wai mahei le - "God - great - the Chief - is" - cannot be understood as more than a simile or analogy by the observer because the Mende do not see Ngewɔ as near, nor as directly involved, but always as transcendent, removed, and interested directly in affairs believed to be more important than the humdrum, which Ngewɔ escaped because of mankind's petty importunings. There is no more than a superficial homology[2] between Ngewɔ and Mahei, and the lack of a developing relationship between man and Ngewɔ is a point of interest in the context of attempts to "Christianize" Mende notions of God.

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[1] Sawyerr, H. (1968). "Creative Evangelism", is an example of the kind of argumentation which in my view reads rather too much into Mende notions of God, and finds too easy parallels with aspects of Christian theology.

[2] Sawyerr, H. (1970) p.63, describes the secular Chief as Judge and Protector, and maintains that "Ngewɔ is thought of in similar terms". The word "similar" is perhaps deliberately vague: there does not seem to be grounds for accepting that Mende believe in anything but the weakest similarity between Ngewɔ and the Chief: there is a fundamental difference - a difference in kind - between the two.

I suggested above, that Mende believe in Ngewɔ as a fact rather than as a person, except in rare and specific instances. The Mende is socialized to approach the deity with appropriate attitudes: fear, respect, hope; but Ngewɔ was simply not involved in diurnal affairs. So what of the phrase used quite often by the Mende Ngewɔ (mia) ngi woma, lit. "Ngewɔ it is - him - behind", - meaning that Ngewɔ approves and ratifies [man's] behaviour? This cannot be said to be a statement to be interpreted literally, nor a statement of faith, but rather a 'just-so' statement used to account for a state of affairs which is socially approved. That is, if a certain thing is socially approved, one can say that "Ngewɔ is behind", (or, "on the back of") the person responsible, since otherwise some manifestation of its incompatibility with the laws underpinning the universe, must come to light. An old Chief told me a story which illustrates the point.

> "The reason why people started to believe in Ngewɔ, goes back to the Mende wars. One man went into his house and prayed to Ngewɔ for seven days, for the fighting to stop, and for his own safety. After that he was hit by a bullet but he did not die; it just went into his breast pocket. So people believed in Ngewɔ and said Ngewɔ ngi woma".

A typical 'just-so' story, and not an act of faith, is thus involved in the use of this common phrase, though it is not said lightly.

How does one prove this kind of assertion? Basically it seems, by gleaning information about Mende attitudes to Ngewɔ in general. These are variable and imprecise, and generally in agreement only about Ngewɔ's lack of direct involvement in the world, his

overall suzerainty always granted. Even in prayers and sacrifices Ngewɔ is rarely addressed directly and exclusively, and rarely the unique focus of group activity, though prayers are implicitly directed to him as their ultimate object. The kinds of exceptions I allow for here, are isolated sayings such as kaye ii Ngewɔ ma or Ngewɔ jaahũ[1] which seem to be directed exclusively at the Supreme Being, but these are formulaic utterances, so frequently said, that it would be impossible for people to advert expressly to their significance, in the vast majority of instances. The frequency of mention of the word Ngewɔ cannot be used to imply Mende consciousness of his presence or influence in everyday life; at the most one may deduce that his reality is accepted without demur, that his non-interference is assumed as normal and that the fact that he sustains the world is formally recalled in conventional recipe phrases such as Ngewɔ jaahũ, kaye ii Ngewɔ ma, and others. The somewhat "dead reference" or formulaic aspect of these phrases, was implicitly acknowledged by an informant talking about a ceremony with prayers: "When [the people] pray they must call Ngewɔ's name. This is because everything is through Ngewɔ".

Apart from studying Mende attitudes to Ngewɔ, more of which will become apparent in due course - in order to understand how Ngewɔ is conceptualized, we can go further in this direction by looking at the main foci of religious interest, to see to what

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[1] Ngewɔ jaahũ - "by Ngewɔ's dispensation": "God willing": it is commonly used at the end of prayers and invocations, somewhat like "please God", or "Amen" as a conclusion to Christian prayers. The phrase is redolent of Christian trust in God and acceptance of His will, but its currency is debased by frequent usage.

extent Ngewɔ is in evidence. Myths about creation and names for Ngewɔ are not generally known in much detail these days by a large proportion of the community. Story tellers may be the repositories of such knowledge, but story telling is a dying art. In the childhood of present-day old people, stories were indeed recounted, though they seem less to have created belief than to have maintained and kindled it. Many stories i n d e e d, are often seemingly banal, inconsistent, or contradictory, and some people are able to appreciate that they are not literally true, without abandoning belief in the reality of Ngewɔ.

Interestingly, it does appear that Ngewɔ is more indulgent to man, and less an impartial judge, than one might have expected at first sight. And this is in fact consistent with his acknowledged omniscience[1] and sympathy for the problems of mankind which manifests itself in his provision of assistance for humanity in the form of spirits, "power" and social groups. Now though he is remote from daily activity, compared with the means of mediation he has left, can we yet say that there is any real worship of Ngewɔ and to what extent do acts of worship among the Mende concern objects and entities other than Ngewɔ? It is true that he is mentioned or at least not excluded from Mende prayers and sacrifices, even though other agents are more directly invoked, but the most noticeable aspect of Mende monotheism is the absence of any sacrifice or rite directed uniquely to Ngewɔ.

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[1] Though Mende people acknowledged that Ngewɔ knows everything in a general sense, I was unable to discover whether he is considered to know the specific thoughts of individuals: the question did not seem altogether valid. He is believed to survey and organize all that goes on in the world, but does not act promptly in reaction to all of man's actions: there may be considerable delay in the working of the justice of Ngewɔ.

His power is acknowledged, yet the Mende knows that he himself does not share in this power or beneficence directly. Consequently actions intended to attract the power and beneficence of Ngewɔ, are directed to the intermediary agents, without denying that their efficacity is derived ultimately from Ngewɔ.

A well known Christian Mendeman, talking about his youth, and paganism, declared that Mende indigenous religion was directed towards a God whose nature was not well known by men.

> "The Mende man has an idea and some knowledge of [the fact of] a Supreme Being, but who is He? Where is He? They don't know this. Natural objects and the spirits of the dead - that is their firm belief."

This rather dismissive statement of Mende belief contains I think, the statement of the key elements of Mende belief, namely that in his search for Ngewɔ or at least the benefits to be derived from him, the Mende concentrates his attention on natural objects and spirits (of the dead). An elaboration of this statement is, it will be argued, the beginning of an understanding of Mende metaphysic and religion. But one or two further statements provide important pieces in the puzzle.

A Paramount Chief, talking about the Societies, made this statement:

> "Ngewɔ is the Supreme Being, but there are many ways of getting on to him - through these mediums. The people definitely didn't think of the cotton tree and so on, as having power, but only the spirit that lives there. Its power came from Ngewɔ."

This is extremely important, though at this stage I will not expand the terms "Societies" and "power" as used by the Chief, more than to say that they are derived from a unitary underlying concept. But

here we again find Ngewɔ and natural objects, - (cotton tree) spirit, power, societies, - occurring in the same context.

Talking of a herbal remedy used by the Njayebla and very clearly prepared or confected, since it came from the bush, I was assured that it was made by Ngewɔ and was the same preparation as that given by him to the original founders of Njayei, Magba and Lomba. Now my informant clearly knew that the remedy had been recently confected, yet maintained that it was made by Ngewɔ. What is being said here, seems to be that certain remedies are different from others, some being the result of human expertise and knowledge, others being derived from a completely different source, who endows the remedy with special strength beyond natural expectations or natural ability to confect. Such remedies are efficacious because of their special nature: they are from Ngewɔ in some direct way, originally given to Magba and Lomba, but guaranteed to work for their legitimate successors. This is only one of many similar examples.

A more explicit reference may sometimes be obtained by asking for explanations of certain objects around villages: some will be explained quite simply , some may not be explained at all; but some will be spoken of thus: "Ngewɔ wa ngi hindɛi lɔ; Ngewɔ mia wɔɔ na leni mu ma" - (God - great - his - business - it is - God (it is) long ago - that he left/begot - us for/on). Such a phrase must be used to explain some object of veneration and relate its usefulness to a specific provision by Ngewɔ.

The Mende is not confused about the difference between inherent power, derived from Ngewɔ and transcending or independent

of the object or place in which it may inhere, and the effectiveness of a purgative, coagulent or other remedy. In the latter case there is a congruence between the herb and its natural effect. In the former, a bag of "medicine", a needle and a piece of shirting, an upturned mortar with pestle and headpads - all these are incongruent with their effects. The explanation is that the Mende does not look for congruence in these cases, but accepts the fact that the effect is due to the presence of extrinsic power. And that power in such circumstances, is a function of the Supreme Being. Thus Ngewɔ's power may inhere in an object but is not constrained by the object itself. It may cease to inhere in the object, and there was a time before which it began to inhere therein: the power is thus extrinsic to the object though it may for a time be localized in it or attracted to it.

3-2.2 Leve

It is neither necessary nor possible within the scope of the present study, to analyze all concepts and attitudes relating to Mende metaphysic and religion: this section therefore does little more than gloss the term "Leve".[1]

Some say Leve is a name used for the Supreme Being; others deny this. It is rarely used nowadays and many Mende do not know the term. When the term appears, it is usually collocated

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[1] for a fuller discussion: Sawyerr, H. (1970) pp.62-91 passim; Harris, W. and Sawyerr, H. (1968) pp.7-8; Little K.L. (1967) p.217-; Harris, W.T., S.L. Bull. of Rel. Vol.5, No.1, pp.34-36.

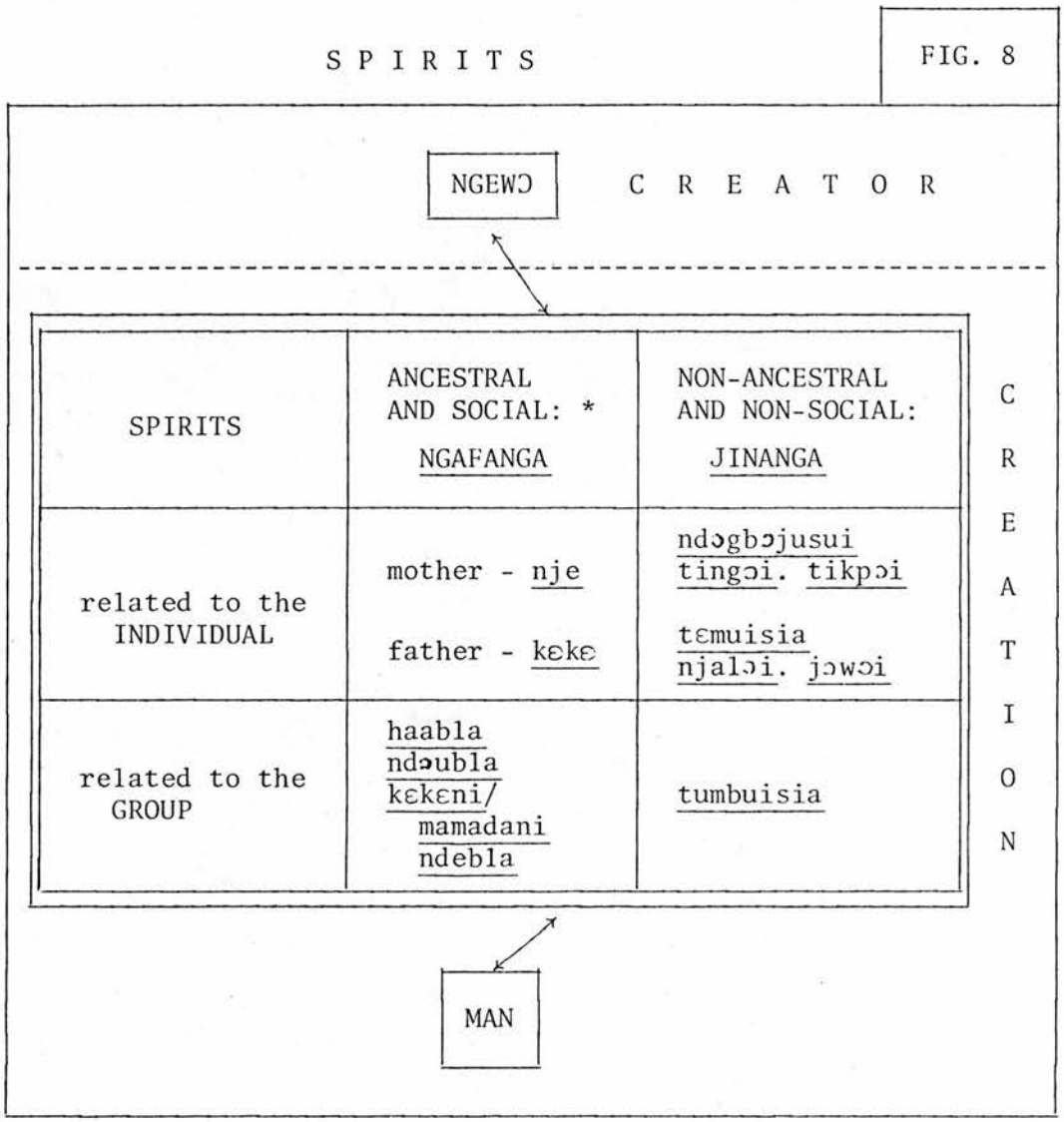
with a verb njei meaning to let down, dispose, appoint. Thus one informant: "If [someone is] sitting at a stone and praying, that stone will be referred to by the words Leve njei (njeini)." "'God' let it down", hence "'God' left it or appointed it (for praying). Whatever the forefathers were performing, they said "Wɔɔ Leve i njeini mu ma" - "Long ago 'God' left it for us", and "Leve mia mu ngi vɛlima." "It is to Leve (God) that we are praying (lit. 'begging')." Another explained: "Leve is one of the primitive names for God. It just means God. It is no different from Ngewɔ. It is dying out now, but was common when I was a child. It was used when they were trying to explain or justify how things had been, right from the beginning. Leve refers to things made: the origin of things. Kia Leve njeini means 'as God made it'."

Precisely why there are two names for God I found impossible to discover satisfactorily. Leve however is characteristically used in the context of the beginnings of behaviour, custom or institutions which are thought to be aboriginal. We shall see other phrases later, for the understanding of which, this short gloss is necessary.

3-3 SPIRITS IN MENDE THOUGHT AND EXPERIENCE

3-3.1 Introduction

We must now undertake a systematic analysis of Mende belief, and expand fig. 7 (p.87 supra) as it relates to spirits (fig. 8).



As will be seen from fig. 8, a distinction is postulated between the Creator and Creation: a distinction which produces a system composed of two elements only. One could suggest three elements, Ngewɔ, mankind, and spirits occupying a place between. Likewise, one may extend this to encompass Ngewɔ, man and "power". To do so however, would be to do violence to what seems to be the Mende view of the universe.

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* 'Social' in the sense that they uphold social norms; even though the non-ancestral or only partly ancestral ndɔubla may be a nuisance, it is to remind the living of their duty to the dead, and of the fact that the dead should properly become ancestors. The jinanga on the other hand, may be selfish, jealous and capricious, hence 'anti-social'.

It would be more correct to say that Mende appreciate that spiritual agents are "closer" to Ngewɔ in the sense that they have a more important function as ambassadors and mediators with mankind, but in a significant sense they are closer to man, since Ngewɔ is transcendent and absolute while spirits are not transendent and only contingent. Further, spirits operate upon the world and mankind as part of their raison d'être, whereas it is not the raison d'être of Ngewɔ to communicate with mankind. All creation is thus qualitatively different from God, but there is only a difference of degree between spirits and men. This can be seen in terms of the ancestral spirits, from these facts: that they were once human, they retain some human habits like eating and drinking, and they are concerned with the well being of their descendents; and in terms of non-ancestral spirits from these further facts: that they are restricted to certain localities and modes of action, they have an affinity for human beings, and they appear in many ways to need human beings rather than to exist satisfactorily as free agents. Ancestral and non-ancestral spirits, and human beings, have relationships of interdependence; and the Mende is aware of such relationships.

3-3.2 The individual and the group

The Mende mostly live in small settlements: the hamlets or satellite villages of between perhaps 40 and 150 people, and the main towns of anything over 150 or 200 people.[1] Until recently most people travelled very little during their lifetime, except for carrying goods to markets such as on the well-worn pepper route between Boajibu and Pujehun, a distance of some 70 miles.

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[1] This is, of course, an extremely rough approximation, but see Chapter 2, p.63 , note 2, supra.

Children were socialized within their own domestic group, and learnt many farming techniques by involvement with farming rather than by formal teaching. Social mores too, were assimilated largely by observation and exposure. The more technical skills, as well as history and traditions seem to have been learnt during the sub-adolescent period through incorporation into the group of adult men (Pɔrɔ) or that of adult women (Bundu/Sande), or into other groups with authority beyond the domestic sphere, and the control of sanctions.[1] Farming was a communal, semi-cooperative affair in all its stages, and a premium was attached to the social virtues of diligence and cooperativeness. In short, individualism, while not unduly stifled, was subordinated to the common good and the man of authority and respect was the one with the interests of the community at heart. An individualistic person may arrogate power to himself, but would lose the cooperation and respect of many, apart from sycophants or clients for his patronage. Safety, both physical and moral, was to be sought within the group, either the well-organized warring-party, the stockaded town or the hunting band on the one hand, or the praying group, the sacrificing group or the ritual group, on the other.

Every man and woman belonged to a variety of overlapping groups whose values they were supposed to share and in terms of which their social identity was ascribed and to some degree achieved. The head of a mawɛi or household, could assemble and deploy farm labour; the Chief could commandeer public labour for bush- or farm-paths and and hammock-roads; but people with such authority were tied in

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[1] See Chapters 4 and 5.

reciprocal relationships with the members of the group. Thus the Chief was the source of protection and sanctuary; a husband had to provide food, clothing and lodging; a father was responsible for the good conduct of his daughter when he accepted bridewealth; and families were linked by certain mutual rights and obligations when marriages were contracted between their respective members.

None of this is new information; none needs further documentation. My purpose in restating the theme here, is to show how the articulation of the religious system in Mende country paralleled to a significant extent, the social organization.

The ancestors are the repository of tradition handed down from the earliest times, and beyond them, immemorial customs of the group are referred to Leve. The Supreme Being appears to be concerned with the generality or collectivity of mankind rather than individuals, except in extreme cases, as we noted. Individual grievances within a Chiefdom can be institutionally settled by reference to local leaders or heads of groups in most cases (the head of the household - mawɛi, or that of a land holding group, the kuwui), and rarely taken to a higher authority. Likewise, the spiritual well-being of various groups, family, kindred, village and so on, is within the competence of various groups of ancestors - not always discrete groups, but sometimes overlapping like membership of groups to which the living belong. Different groups of the living, deploy and consult different groups of ancestors. But individuals may belong to several groups. And Mende social organization encourages harmonious relations between various categories or groups of people, while the internal relations of these groups is sanctioned by the corresponding groups of ancestors.

There is a variety of sanctions, to check aggressive or dangerous individualism. Simple anti-social behaviour may be dealt with by the legitimate head of a group to which the individual belongs and which has been wronged. If a wife fails in her domestic duties, the head of the family is granted redress - specified in traditional law or custom. If necessary, the wife's family will be appealed to, and failing this, the native court under the Chief may adjudicate and call on the representatives of the conjugal and kin groups.

Individual faults of a ritual or moral kind are likewise liable to punishment, and the diagnostician of such faults - characteristically the tɔtɔgbɛmɔi, fortune-teller, or better, diviner,[1] - may send the offender to make his peace with one of the groups with authority over specific infractions of the ritual or moral code - for example the humɔi, kpaa, felanga practitioners, to be discussed later, or perhaps any of more than a dozen other groups who are executors over "power" derived from Ngewɔ. Again, the diviner may send him to make reparation or supplication to a group of ancestors or an individual spirit.

Perhaps the most feared sanction against maleficient or even malevolent individualism, is the threat of witchcraft accusations, and such accusations and trials seem to act as ritual scavenging devices to root out residual malice within a community; malice which may have escaped the more conventional discovery procedures. But the

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[1] tɔtɔgbɛmɔi is one who deals with pebbles or stones.
bɛɛmɔi or bɛlɛmɔi is a more general term referring to "one who scrutinizes/examines": from bɛɛ/bɛlɛ - scrutinize, examine.

tendency for individuals to pursue their selfish ambitions and balance these against the demands of the community so as to achieve a satisfying synthesis between individual aspiration and social responsibility, is perhaps the hallmark of "political" man everywhere, and is a challenge which many Mende certainly, find irresistible.

The Mende is not unambitious; he is as likely as not to promote his self interest above community values. Yet there is inevitably risk in such an endeavour, and the risks are probably as great as the potential advantages. Sometimes fission is possible - of the farming group, for example - but fission within one group involves tension, since in a small-scale society relationships are multiplex and groups non-discrete. Social pressure is thus directed to maintaining community values and conformity, and there are sufficient social and ritual mechanisms to maintain this in "traditional" Mende society.[1]

3-3.3 Ancestral spirits, the individual, and the group

It is important to discover how the Mende view the cosmos, in order to understand something of the choices, fears and dangers which present themselves to people, and to see what communal values are upheld by the ancestors. More particularly we will try to appreciate why certain values are upheld, and by which ancestors; and to go some way thereby to resolving the apparent problem of the discrepancy between a formally re-created model of Mende "world-view" so called, and the less than uniform behaviour which has been observed by students of Mende social and religious values.

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[1] Further ethnographic data from informants, and relevant to this over-view, will be presented later.

What then, characterizes the ancestors and how can knowledge of their position and sphere of activity provide insights into the structure and rationale of Mende belief and thought?

While they were ordinary living human beings, the ancestors were the same as people now alive, in behaviour and aspirations. They experienced many of the same problems, made the same mistakes, were vulnerable to the same dangers as their contemporaries. Now they enjoy a different mode of existence: precisely how and in what mode they exist, is not a subject of great interest to the Mende. The fact that they unquestionably exist, precludes undue speculation. However, they are believed to have retained their interest in their descendants, and are capable of sympathy and advice as well as correction and rebuke. Nevertheless, they have "crossed the water", and a ceremony has been performed marking their translation to a new place or state. This ceremony, performed three days after the death of a woman, or four days after that of a man, called tenjamɛi, signals that the dead person has joined the community of ancestors "across the river". (tenjamɛi = tewe (pass, cross) + nja (water, river, stream) + ma = on/over), and as the dead rejoices in this community, so the living mark the occasion with a celebration, if only the sharing of a chicken, but formerly a great feast consistent with the status of the deceased. At this feast the living are mobilized, the masked dancers of Pɔrɔ and Bundu perform, and the ancestors are offered libations and sacrifices; the whole community is involved.[1]

[1] A "diary" written by a Catholic missionary before 1930, contains vivid, precise and valuable information of high ethnographic merit. When referring to it, it will be quoted as C.S.Sp. (F) 1930. This is an interesting kind of "rite de passage": the deceased, having passed from living (human) to dead (corpse) now becomes living (ancestor). As he leaves one status after a liminal period of three or four days, he enters a new status. The living are required, to perform this translation; they in turn will enjoy the (cont.)

If a person dies far from his family or in battle or other exceptional circumstances, and the tenjamɛi is not performed, then the dead person fails to qualify as a full ancestor and member of the community of ancestral spirits, but may continue existence as what we might call an earth-bound spirit - one vaguely discontented and liable to be capricious. Some of the spirits then, are those whose funerary ceremonies were not performed, and since they are a nuisance and sometimes a threat to the living, their existence is a reminder to all, to ensure they bury their dead properly,[1] and for the individual to make provisions for his own burial - a sentiment which figures largely among many self-styled "Christians" afraid of not being properly buried unless they join a group which will ensure burial.

Having now achieved safety, a new social status and identity, and a harmonious existence, yet still retaining an interest in the affairs of the world of living men and women, the ancestors are in a position both to direct the aspirations of men, and to beg Ngewɔ on their behalf.[2] The ancestors too, are believed to act as

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[1] (cont.) benison of the ancestors. At the funeral of a twin, gbɛse performs a ceremony in which he uses a phrase "kpakpanjaa, njɛi wuli o". Though impossible to translate accurately (and no one knew precisely what it meant) it refers certainly to water and rowing or crossing water. Some people opined that kpakpanjaa is the name of the first (single) Mende twin. (cf. infra.)

[1] For an extended case study, cf. Hofstra, S. (1941).

[2] A prayer addressed to Ngewɔ and illustrating the ancestral status of the deceased, is the following: "O Ma Ngewɔ, bi mu hɛisia humɛni mu piema ha bi gama. Kinii Kunawai mu wa bi gama; kinii —— , i hiti bi ma. I fo miando, i na polɔŋ nja woma. O Ma Ngewɔ mu wa ha bi gama; Kɛkɛ i hiti bi ma, i fo nya nje ma, i fo nya ndewai ma, nasia wɔɔ ti lenga. Mama wa ti fo bi ma, mama yafanga . . . "

"O Great Ngewɔ, hear the prayers we make to you today. Mr. Kunawa we have come to you; Mr. —— has reached you. He has reached over there, he has gone far across the water. O Great Ngewɔ we have come to you today; father has reached you, he has reached my mother, he has reached my elder brother, [and] those who passed away [bore them], long ago. The grandparents have reached you, the spirits [yafanga] of the grandparents . . . "

a channel of Ngewɔ's indulgence: they thus dispense to the living, his power and blessing. We saw that though Ngewɔ's benevolence towards mankind is unquestioned, access to his beneficence is indirect. One way of gaining such access is by observing conventional codes of behaviour towards the ancestors, who, since they act as intermediaries and since they have "crossed the river" to a new realm, are now closer to Ngewɔ, though still belonging to the world of nature.

Insofar as they are immortal and "fixed" in the sense that they are no longer developing, Ngewɔ and the spirits are to mankind, as proprietor and land-lords are to tenants. Ngewɔ is the Creator and proprietor of the earth and the spirits exercise some sway over it. But there are other things in nature: animals and birds and natural objects, bush and villages. All these too have some relation to the earth.

Man is part spirit, but since he is a corporal being, he is limited somewhat by his body and lives out his human existence moving over the surface of the earth and settling thereon. Freed from his body and translated "across the water", he will no longer be dependent on the earth, though in contact with its denizens. Likewise he will not depend on the physical needs of his earthly existence, yet will accept food and drink by way of maintaining social and moral ties with the living. Since he is no longer incarnated but enjoys the independent existence of a spirit, he is now free of the terrestrial restrictions of the living, and exists beyond the earth.

Animals are not usually regarded as having spirits - certainly not the same kind of ngafanga (ngafa, sing; spirit)

attributed to other orders of creation.[1] Most of them are confined to the bush, ndɔgbɔi, a word glossed as red land/earth, (ndɔ(lɔ), earth, country: kpɔu/gbɔu, red).[2] In fact many Mende are content to accept this etymology, but some older and wiser maintain a quite different interpretation. The phrase Ngewɔ ta ngi nyahɛi Mandɔ, meaning "Ngewɔ and his wife Mandɔ, (lit: earth-mother)" is fairly commonly used when people are talking about the relationship between Ngewɔ and the earth. But Mandɔ is significant here since ndɔ-gbɔi means "(Ma)ndɔ swallowed it": (kpɔle/gbɔi = to drink, swallow). Hence "the bush" means "that part (of the earth) that Earth-Mother swallowed", and Mende explain this by saying that the bush is the place of big trees and thick vegetation which has been "caught" or "swallowed" by Mandɔ, so that it is fixed, immoveable, caught in the earth by its roots. Within the bush are animals which are also "fixed" to their habitat. Man however lives in a town (ta = nest, receptacle) which is moveable and of his own making. Man and animals are essentially different and maintain different relations to the earth. Birds have some freedom in excess of human ability, inasmuch as they can fly above the earth, and though beneath man in aspirations and in the fact that like animals they are not spiritual, nevertheless, not only do they live, like man, in a ta,[3] many of them are birds of omen and messengers from the spirits. Birds thus have affinities with animals, man and spirits.

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[1] It seems that, to the Mende, ancestors are powerful because they are predominantly spirit; in this sense, that men are body-and-spirit, and animals are body-and-vital-principle, but in neither man nor animals does spirit dominate. A Mende knows what is the ordinary capacity of other men or animals. When however a human being has, for some reason, a preponderance of spirit or an unusual spirit-body relationship, he is thought to be in some way more numinous, powerful or dangerous than others of his class. Such are monsters, twins and returning children, which we consider later.

[2] Jɛ̨drej, M.C. (1974) p.42.

[2] bird's nest - ŋɔni tɛí, and tɛí is a form of tá.

Non-ancestral spirits are not as free as ancestral spirits. Their field of action is circumscribed and different spirits are associated with different localities about the earth.

Finally, imposing natural objects of phenomena exist or take place upon the earth: strangely shaped mountains or rock formations; deep pools, cataracts, or important rivers; thunderbolts or caves; and so on. Thus various aspects of the world of nature may be seen in relation to the earth and by comparison with mankind (fig.9).

FIG. 9

The Natural World: variety, characteristics, and activity		
ANCESTORS	Spiritual	'Beyond the earth'
NON-ANCESTORS	Spiritual	'About/around the earth'
MANKIND	Spiritual and physical (body)	'Over the earth'
ANIMALS	Physical (body)	'Across the earth'
BIRDS	Physical (body) - 'paraspiritual' -	'Above the earth'
THE DEAD	Physical (corpse)	'Below the earth'
NATURAL OBJECTS	Physical (non-corporal)	'Upon the earth'

This is not exhaustive and not very sophisticated but is used simply so as to be able to place things in the world of nature, and particularly the ancestors at this point, in some kind of context. Since the Mende himself has no experience of a purely spiritual

existence, and since his life is largely taken up with pragmatic affairs, he rarely has any more need to speculate about its nature than does the missionary need a precise definition of heaven or an understanding of the mode of existence associated with it.[1] The Mende knows enough about spirits for practical purposes, and where more specific knowledge is required, he will undertake to discover it.

The ancestors are those people who have died and been translated to a state of ancestorhood, through the tenjamɛi ceremony. The Mende have a variety of names applying to the dead, and it will be necessary to pay attention to these, on the assumption that a variety of names implies a variety of referents.

ndɔubla is a general term used for the dead, but applies to those who are simply "dead and buried", rather than carrying implications about ancestorhood. Strictly it would only be applied to non-ancestral dead; people who had not had the tenjamɛi performed.

When pressed, Mende speak of the ndɔubla as the "underground people", but I think it can be safely maintained that this is not a literal reference to an existence enjoyed under the ground, but a reference to the state of 'having been buried'. People who are asked what happens, after death, are vague and sometimes conflicting

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[1] Unless a theologian, the ordinary missionary would seem to be either positively unconcerned about the nature of heaven or the mode of heavenly existence, or thinks of it as a paradigm of human happiness raised to a spiritual level, at which point conceptualizations fail. Since he can say nothing about purely spiritual well-being, his verbalization would be largely inadequate for a philospher or logician let alone a theologian. Yet for the missionary, heaven is supremely important.
Considerations such as these, may help in an understanding of Mende attitudes.

but this is partly due to the framing of the question. Soon after death, people are in the ground; but their aspirations are to move to the land of the ancestors and no one wants to remain in the ground.

The ndɔubla then are the undifferentiated collectivity of those who are buried. ndɔwu/ndɔu, underground, in the earth: ndɔwu = to hide. ndɔ = earth. wu / pu = put, place. -bla = plural indefinite suffix.

Thus, ndɔubla are "the hidden ones" or "those placed in the earth".[1]

The first intervocalic /l/ usually drops, to give halabla haabla, a word which is open to misinterpretation. habla may mean "the people dead", from ha, die. In this sense however, it is rarely employed.[2] habla with only a difference of tone, is frequently used, and in reference to "the first people" (hala = first).[3] Now this word is by no means as vague as the word which can mean "dead people" (habla). habla/halabla means those of the ancestors who are so remote that they were the founding

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[1] ndɔubla has been translated or glossed as "ghosts". This term is too general for consideration here except that one could concede that precisely insofar as they have not had the tenjamɛi ceremony, the ndɔubla are unsatisfied and earthbound spirits, not properly integrated either with the living or with the ancestors. In this sense the word 'ghost' could be applied.

[2] Though Hofstra (1941) p.178, uses it mistakenly (?) in this sense.

[3] It seemed to me that this word was generally used to emphasise the fact that there were founding fathers long ago, who were human like present day Mende. In other words halabla does not contain a specific note of "spirit"; whereas the first autochthonous inhabitants, the dwarfs or tumbuisia, are thought of as spiritual agents. Also morphologically, halabla is a general indefinite term, and tumbuisia is specific.

fathers, the first people to settle in Mendeland or to found a town. When Mende want to emphasise the period of antiquity in which these ancestors lived, they may use the reduplicated form halahalabla.

kambɛihubla

"grave-in-people" and other composites, are merely descriptive phrases of a general kind, such as our own references to the dead as those who have "passed on", "passed over", "gone to their rest" and many others which can be coined.[1]

kɛkɛni

mamadani

The suffix -ni can be glossed as "companions", or "those in the same group". kɛkɛ refers to one's father and in a classificatory sense to males in the same generation. As a term of respect, kɛkɛ may be used to address an older male of one's father's generation.

mamada/maada can refer to father's or mother's father, males of their generation, and as a term of respect to elderly men, typically a chief. kɛkɛni and mamadani however, are used specifically for close ancestors of the local group. That is, they refer to ancestors remembered by the living, as of only one or two generations previously.[2] A group invoking its kɛkɛni or mamadani would include the deceased father, grandfather, and their relatives, of any individual within the group. A remembered family-head kɛkɛ or maada, moreso than a long dead ancestor, is believed to have the same needs, moods, and dispositions as he had while alive, and family ceremonies will include not only offerings of food and drink, but pleas and flattery

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[1] Jędrej, M.C., (1974) p.40, cites klobla. I take this to be a form of kulo-bla, "together-people", but it is glossed only as "predecessors".

[2] Harris, W.T. and Sawyerr, H. (1968) pp.2,16.

to appease. Attitudes towards kɛkɛni and mamadani are to a great extent the same as those maintained towards respected living elders. Even in prayers and ceremonies to more distant ancestors, a certain protocol is maintained, demanding that the kɛkɛni and mamadani have requests submitted for their approval, before such requests find their way to the more distant ancestors and to Ngewɔ. These close ancestors then, have moral authority over the living and the power of moral sanctions.[1]

ndebla

Distinct from the kɛkɛni and mamadani by the fact that they were ancestors prior to the compass of living memory and are regarded as important figures of yore rather than people remembered for any specific deeds or words, the ndebla are those who produced the tribe and clan, including the founders of one's own lineage. The same word is sometimes used for the people of one's lineage, but more commonly the fuller ndehũbla is so used (ndehũ - "largest group of kin"). One literate Mende said that ndebla are "those from whose stock a clan has risen", which is interesting for its emphasis on antiquity and social prestige, rather than as a translation.

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[1] Harris, W.T. and Sawyerr, H. (1968) p.29. I can speak with no more certainty than Harris could, on this point. It is tempting to systematize data, but Mende do not share this intellectual fastidiousness and refuse to be drawn into the web of neat analysis.

The various names for the dead have been introduced and glossed, and it is now necessary to categorise them in order to show their relevance. We shall look at the relations of individuals to ancestors, and of different groups to ancestors, according to the scheme outlined in fig. 8, (p.100 supra) and partly reproduced below.

ANCESTRAL SPIRITS (NGAFANGA) — FIG. 8a

SPIRITS	ANCESTRAL: NGAFANGA
related to the INDIVIDUAL	mother - nje father - kɛkɛ
INDIVIDUAL and/or GROUP	ndɔubla
related to the GROUP	kɛkɛni/ mamadani ndebla

I have omitted halabla, habla, kambeihũbla, klobla and others which are descriptive or general, to leave the ngafanga which are important to the Mende in a particular rather than a purely generic sense.

nya nje - my mother.
nya kɛkɛ - my father.

The individual has a responsibility to his parents and a man will explain, that before he sacrifices to his ndebla or joins a group of prayers, he must acquit his duty to his own father. A man would pray through his father and mother, and leave food on the grave, but the Mende believe that the spirit of a departed mother is more powerful than that of a deceased father. One informant explained rather elliptically: "if anyone insults your father, you should

insult his father. If anyone insults your mother you do not insult his mother, but report to your father. The mother-ancestor is more powerful than the father." A son or the oldest surviving member of a family, would be expected to make libations and offerings of rice at the grave of recently deceased parents. In other words, there is a relationship of respect and consideration expected between an individual and his deceased parent or parents, and the parents are believed to bring good or ill fortune (of an admittedly non-specific fashion) to offspring, according to the way those offspring treated them while alive, and fulfilled their obligations to them after their death.

Other relationships exist between groups of living people and groups of ancestors, but the ndɔubla are in a special category.

> the generality of the dead who for whatever reason ndɔubla, were not translated to the state of full ancestors,

nevertheless had families of orientation and perhaps of procreation and hence were situated in a web of relationships while alive. The indications are that within living memory but less so now, they were believed to be able to invoke sanctions against both individuals and

groups who were in some way responsible for their failure to achieve the status of full-ancestors.[1]

The ngafanga which remain to be considered, are kɛkɛni, mamadani and ndebla. We have seen how ancestral spirits relate to individuals: to see how they relate to groups, it is first necessary to consider a variety of groups which may be identified among the Mende.

Many people would agree with the kind of sentiment expressed by Firth, to the effect that "religion reflects the structure of society"[2] rather than explaining the social order.

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[1] An indication of this is that latterly most people will call themselves "Christian" or "Muslim"; and the term "kafisia", probably of Arabic origin and applied to a "traditional" Mende, now carries distinct overtones of ignorance, primitiveness and the like. Few people confess to being neither Christian nor Muslim, and those who are neither, usually need the support of a fairly strong family group in order to maintain their independence of the world religions. Many of those who profess to belong to the world religions, are accused by their fellows of doing so only "for the burial": that is, they are said to be afraid that their own family no longer cares for them nor fears their retribution as they used to.
A person who calls himself a Christian or a Muslim, will, in default of the family assuming responsibility, be buried by the Christian or Muslim community, if necessary on the orders of the Chief, and will be assured of a reasonable burial. Those who have no such affiliations and no family, will be buried, but without ceremonial, the Chief being able to pay a token penny to Chiefdom labour for the grave digging and burial. Such would become ndɔubla, a situation which would have existed formerly, only in exceptional circumstances, since individuals and groups of kin would not have entertained the idea of a ndɔumɔi (sing.) at large.

[2] Firth, R. (1960), p.140.

Horton views religion "as an extension of the field of people's social relationships beyond the confines of a purely human society".[1] It would be impracticable to review here the problems of defining religion,[2] but insofar as the relation between mankind and ancestors is an extension of the field of people's social relationships beyond the confines of a purely human society, then we are here within the realm of the religious,[3] and it should be possible to test some hypotheses relative to the compatibility and relationship between empirical characteristics of a specific social organization, and the broad lines of structure underpinning the religious organization. What I have in mind here is a hypothesis advanced by Horton:

> "In the case of a system in which relations between the segments of a group at any level in the whole, are markedly competitive, every level will have its own set of cults distinct from all other levels in the system. In each level, furthermore, there will be at least as many distinct, though mutually equivalent cults as there are competing segments in it. At the lowest level - that of the individual - an alternative to the last condition may be the soliciting by many individuals of a single god whose culturally defined lack of concern with the welfare of any particular social group, makes him a suitable instrument of individualistic aspirations through an implication of his readiness to sell to the highest bidder, irrespective of provenance."[4]

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[1] Horton, R. (1960), p.211.

[2] Banton, M. (ed.) (1966).

[3] Geertz, C. (1973,1975). "Religion is sociologically interesting not because . . . it describes the social order . . . but because . . . it shapes it." p.119
"[Beliefs] . . . do not merely interpret social and psychological processes in cosmic terms . . . but they shape them." p.124.

[4] Horton, R. op.cit., p.214.

Here is a testable hypothesis which can be applied to the Mende data - not only in relation to ancestor-focused cult groups, but to cult groups which mobilise for a variety of different purposes, which we shall see in the next chapter. It seems to me, possible and desirable to explicate and systematize, not simply the range of names applied to the deceased, in terms of this hypothesis, but further to encompass a wide variety of religious and other organizations and behaviour, which have hitherto been at best seen as only loosely connected, at worst "an incoherent constellation of meaningless bits and pieces".[1] By testing and developing this hypothesis, I hope it can be demonstrated that Mende religion, though complex, is a coherently articulated system; that indigenous explanations of the parts of this system must be taken seriously and not simply interpreted symbolically, after the fashion of liberal romantics;[2] and since no individual operates all levels of the system simultaneously, though he makes decisions and exercises choice relating to one or other part of the system as a whole, the lack of an explicit overall indigenous "religious philosophy" is not only not surprising but of the same general kind as the day to day attitude of a Western theologian or scientist, to Theology or Science as formal systems.

The inconsistencies adumbrated in the context of missionary activity, and highlighting the discrepancy between theory and action, ideal and behaviour, faith and consciousness, are of the same kind - and "obligatory" in a Durkheimian sense - as the syncretism and apparent unpredictability and thence inferred irrationality of the Mende.[3]

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[1] Jędrej, M.C. (1976) p.256.

[2] cf. Horton, R. (1973) p.284ff.

[3] Horton, R. (1973) loc.cit.

What then, is to be said about the spirit of competition in Mende society, and can we discern any "correspondences" between typical social groupings and typical religious groupings? It is well enough known that Mende descent groups are relatively weak and not of major social importance, and that the village-based groups are more socially significant. We will see if this deployment is replicated on the level of religious and cult groupings.

The loyalty of the Mende is invoked at various levels, corresponding to his membership of various groups. The largest group with which he identifies is the tribe.[1] Between his tribal membership at one pole, and loyalty to self at the other, the Mende is incorporated into a range of social and kin groups (quite apart from other groups to be discussed in the next chapter), with overlapping membership and sometimes conflicting loyalties.

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[1] This refers particularly to pre-independence days and applies nowadays in rural areas where Nationalism is virtually meaningless except as an ideology espoused by political leaders at the parliamentary level. Above the level of the tribe is the idea of the wider unity of the nation - Sierra Leoneans. For those who find the political ideology of "one nation" too remote when applied to Sierra Leone's external relations with, say, the Commonwealth, there is, I will argue later, a form of increasing nationalism. This does not so much work towards creating one nation identifiable from the outside in relation to the world stage, but at creating internal solidarity. The thesis that corresponding to competitive groups or levels there are distinct cults, can be applied to this latter instance where the Wunde society originally confined to Kpa Mende as a society with strong martial characteristics, and later as a society for social and political advancement and fund raising, is recently enjoying a remarkable resurgence and initiating not just from kɔɔ Mende but from other tribes, including among its newer members the overseas-educated, Westernized elite of the legal and political professions.

For the purposes of analysis, we distinguish the following: Tribe, sub-tribe, Province, Chiefdom, Section, Village (Town and satellites), kuwui, mawɛi, descent group, family, and individual.

TRIBE

The tribe is the largest unit whose members understand the same language and whose social organization, particularly as expressed through the dominant social and sexual groupings, including the most inclusive of the so-called "Secret-Societies", is common. This is a working definition derived from informants: it does not pretend to be any more,[1] and is not pursued here, since the Tribe as such, does not mobilize as a competitive, praying or worshipping group,[2] though the Mende people "possess a definite consciousness of themselves as a single people".

SUB-TRIBE

This distinction is defined by the Mende, partly on linguistic grounds, kɔɔ/kpa,[3] partly in terms of the presence (kpa) or absence (kɔɔ) of the Wunde society, though historical and demographic arguments may be invoked to distinguish small Mende-influenced but distinctly different sub groups such as the Sherbro-Mende, the Mende speaking Banta, and so on.

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[1] This complicated definitional problem is outlined in the literature. cf. Narroll, R., on mutual intelligibility; Narroll, R., "Ethnic Unit Classification"; Bailey's distinctions in Tribe, Caste, and Nation; Murdoch, G.P., Human Relations Area File; etc.

[2] The well known Mende uprising in 1898 - The Hut Tax War - a remarkable example of a nation wide effort against an external threat, is not important to the thesis I am pursuing here, though insofar as it was a competitive group against the British, it threw up a distinct cult, the Pɔrɔ - an organization with many distinguishable functions and institutions. cf. Little, K.L. (1948), (1965)(a)(b).

[3] The orthography and grammar of Mende follow Kɔɔ Mende speech and Innes, G. (1969) p.viii, distinguishes Kɔɔ and Kpa varieties but refuses to comment on the rival claims to linguistic purity. Kɔɔ and Kpa are mutually intelligible.

PROVINCE

The Provinces as Administrative areas, bear no absolute relation to Mende groupings, and as such do not concern us here.

CHIEFDOMS

Although Chiefdom boundaries have been fixed somewhat arbitrarily in some cases, and various Chiefdoms have been broken up or later amalgamated so that present day Chiefdoms are a very different picture from what they were in the last century, nevertheless the Chiefdom is the largest grouping whose subdivisions are important to this analysis.

There are now about 147 Chiefdoms in Sierra Leone, of which approximately seventy are Mende or predominantly Mende.[1] The Chiefdom collects tax from household heads, the Chief is paid a salary[2] according to the population of his Chiefdom and is ultimately responsible for the maintenance of Native Law and order, with some power of sanctions, presently less since the establishment of Native Administration Courts[2] and Chiefdom Police. Serious civil and criminal cases are tried in the Provincial Headquarters.

Within the Chiefdom and according to character, the Chief was a man or woman with real authority, particularly over important sacrifices, "swears", initiations, witchcraft trials and other religious or ritual undertakings; he could also provide sanctuary and commonly judged cases.[3]

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[1] Census, (1965); Little, K.L. (1967) p.63.

[2] Since 1936 when the Native Administration was established.

[3] I here intend to test Horton's hypothesis, and hence present only the minimum information on points not directly relevant to it. Fuller treatment of powers of Chiefs and Political organization may be found in: Little, K.L. (1967) Ch.5,9, particularly.

SECTIONS

Within a Chiefdom are several "Sections" (now usually five or six), each with a section-chief, and under each section are perhaps a dozen or so villages each with its own village chief or headman. Very small hamlets will be under the protection of a larger, neighbouring village. Sectional interests are maintained either at the Chiefdom level, or by recourse to village- or descent-groups within the section. Thus the section as such has no intrinsic importance on a ritual level, but is administratively and politically significant: political competition within a section is only quantitatively different from other forms of political competition, and an ambitious village chief may seek sectional authority, where both risks and prestige are higher than at village level. If so, he will probably look for assurances of continued success, from diviner, Society leader[1] or spirits.

VILLAGE

kuwui, mawɛi, ndehũ. The village shares and farms land distributed amongst its members; and the land-holding units, kuwuisia[2] (compounds) formed of households or mawɛisia, are composed of the nuclei of descent groups. The descent groups are in fact dispersed and do not assemble as corporate units on a regular basis, either for prayers or sacrifices to

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[1] One of the specialities of the Njayei society, is the provision of means for achieving political success, especially positions as head man or Chief.

[2] Little, K.L. (1967) p.101f, uses kulokwei for "leader of the Kuwui": Jędrej, M.C., Ph.D. (Unpublished MS., University of Edinburgh), uses kulokwei for both.

ancestors, or for social or labour purposes.[1] The quotient of kuwuisia makes up the village, and the mawɛisia which constitute each kuwui, provide the various lineages (ndehũ) whose members are the ndehũbla. It is impossible to find a 1:1 correspondence between several mawɛisia and a ndehũ, or between a kuwui and a ndehũ because the patrilineages are weak and dispersed, but it is valid to say that in most cases, members of a lineage living in a town would belong to the same kuwui, though within a large kuwui there may be members of several prominent lineages, and also single families who have hived off from their lineage of orientation. Little situates the ndehũbla as the nucleus of the kuwui, nicely, saying that the ndehũbla are

> "persons standing in close blood relationship with each other . . . who constitute a descent group for purposes of the inheritance of land . . . the kuwui is relatively heterogeneous." [2]

I shall illustrate that the kuwui as a descent group for the purposes of the inheritance of land, is also a significant group in relation to the ancestors: more than that, though the kuwui is made up of

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[1] Death, and the consequent funeral ceremonies will attract some of the dispersed descent group, but on a regular basis only those members who are living together or near each other will gather for other rites; and then primarily as members of a village or other social grouping, rather than as descent group. Following Horton's suggestion we can see the relationship of these two facts, - little social grouping according to descent group, and likewise little cult/ritual grouping as descent group. When the group does assemble, it is most commonly at the "40 day" ceremony after death - a Muslim tradition - for feasting, contributions to expenditure, and social contact. By then, any traditional ceremonies connected with the funeral, will have been performed. Nowadays many Mende, unaware of the Muslim background to the 40 days ceremony, explain it and the less important "seven days" ceremony, thus: After seven days, the body has started to rot; after 40, "all the flesh has fallen off the bones". These are then believed by some, to be significant stages.

[2] Little, K.L. (1967) p.101.

branches of several ndehũ and is "relatively heterogeneous", the ndehũ is homogeneous though dispersed and has affinal and social ties with other ndehũ within the kuwui and the village. Hence, relative to the kuwui and the village, the ndehũ is a self-conscious group, the localized part of a lineage, and able to mobilize and cooperate in terms of that identifiability.

Several mawɛisia, each under a head who is responsible for protection of members and allocation of labour, make up a kuwui, and in one town of 832[1] persons, there were seven kuwuisia. Theoretically there are as many sections in a town as there are kuwuisia, and the leader or head of each - the kulokwei, is responsible for tax returns, but in practice there may be more kuwui than sections, especially if there are Limbas, Fulas or other quite large minorities in the town, with the status of kuwuisia.[2]

An individual Mende does not of course find the difference between kuwui, mawɛi and ndehũ problematical, nor does he confuse his rights and obligations in regard to them: he will identify with his mawɛi on the domestic level; with the kuwui on the level of land tenure, and with the ndehũ on the wider kinship level. He will have affines in other ndehũ, and because people rarely move too far from the place of their birth, or from an area in which some of his ndehũbla live, his village and perhaps its satellites,[3] or conversely his village and the others within his section of the Chiefdom, will be the largest units for social and religious gatherings of any frequency.

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[1] 1974-5 Census for Njala Komboya.

[2] And a numerically small kuwui in one town may be included in the same section as another, and have members in other satellite villages nearer to the land held by the kuwui.

[3] Little, K.L. (1947). "The emerging picture is of a number of main villages or small towns (rarely more than 100 houses) each with its own set of outlying hamlets."

Here one is trying to distinguish between a system based on the principle of unilineal descent, and one based on residential patterns which themselves are derived with reference to kinships and to land owned by groups of kin.[1] It is the latter that we are trying to characterize.

FAMILY

The family in the sense of Ego's relations by descent or marriage, living in the same town, is the mbondɛi and the difference between it and the ndehũ, is therefore, the presence in the former of affines, and the fact that part of the mbondɛi is those members of the ndehũ who are not dispersed. In daily social intercourse people would refer to their mbondɛi as a general term for family, whereas they would refer to their ndehũbla to include those members who were living elsewhere, and also perhaps to exclude women and affines (women) and thence mobilize a specific group.

The nuclear family however, has no social position in Mende country: true, the husband has authority over wife and children, but he himself derives his status and social position from elsewhere - chiefly according to his position in his mawɛi or kuwui, which as explained above are both socially and politically important.

In summary then, the Chiefdom is an aggregate of villages within Chiefdom sections. Each section has a section Chief who is head of one of the kuwui in his own town. Each town Chief is the

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[1] Little, K.L. (1967) p.98.

head of a kuwui.[1] Within the village are numbers of kuwuisia further divided into mawɛisia for some purposes, but also made up of the nuclei of different ndehũ and a variety of mbondɛisia, (mbondɛi, sing.). Again one may distinguish analytically: individual nuclear families; groupings of Christians and Muslims; men and women; and so on, according to a variety of criteria.

The problem now, is to judge whether various groups characterized by strong competition, have strong and distinct cults.

The mawɛi and the ndehũ. Such competitiveness as may be found within the mawɛi is either a function of individuality or of the developmental cycle of the domestic group, tending to fission: in other words the mawɛi is an arena for individual opportunity and ambition, or for the process of the reallocation of authority within the larger descent group.

Women cannot become mawɛi heads,[2] since authority of this sort is a male preserve, and moreover a position held by an adult married male with children. The positions of authority within the mawɛisia follow therefore, the authority lines of the descent group or are the result of individual competition. Thus a man may become mawɛi-head on the death of his father or elder brother, or he may opt to found his own mawɛi provided he has a sufficient work force, sufficient support, and land within the kuwui. There is ethnographic

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[1] The coincidence of Chief and head of kuwui is by no means as strong as it used to be, however. Mende seem to agree that a contender for a village or section Chieftaincy would have been the head of a family and thus a kuwui or mawɛi head depending on the size of the village. Now however, people who have migrated to jobs in towns and do not hold local positions of authority in their own villages or sections, are increasingly able to rally political support for their contesting of Chieftaincy vacancies.

[2] "An interesting exception is found in the case of a woman Paramount Chief who is head of her mawɛi, but as Chief is fictively regarded as a man with "wives" (i.e. female servants), and no husband (though with lovers). To some extent this also applies where a woman is section Chief." I am grateful to Rev. J. Gilroy C.S.Sp., for pointing out this omission in the above analysis.

documentation of this already published,[1] in which the mawɛi-head is described as a man with several wives and children, and ultimately such of his sons as succeeded in winning their father's favour would have started their own mawɛi by hiving off, but with slaves provided by him, or at his death by patrilineal inheritance. There was then, a form of patronage within the mawɛi, which in common with other reported instances, provided ample opportunity for cooperation, filial devotion, and similar forms of competition for the notice and approbation of the mawɛi-head.

The mawɛi-head has authority over his own extended family and other people who look for his protection within the mawɛi. Nevertheless, beyond domestic jurisdiction the headman was responsible to the other heads of the patrilineage, of which he himself might be a key figure if he was successful and respected. It is thus clear that authority within various mawɛisia was not absolute but subordinate to the demands of the descent group, (ndehũ). Competition existed both within and between various mawɛisia in the general field of control of the descent group.

The kuwui and the ndehũ. The kuwui is a higher-order grouping than the mawɛi, but like it dependant ultimately on the descent group, in this sense: that the legitimate authority within or over the kuwui is intrinsically related to the position of the authority-holder in relation to his descent group (ndehũ). Hence there is individual competition within the kuwui

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[1] Little, K.L. (1967) pp.96 sqq.

just as within the mawɛi, but the successful acquisition of authority within the kuwui was not an end in itself so much as a reflection of one's position in the hierarchy of one's descent group.

The kuwui nucleus is the local group (including members beyond the village in which kuwui head and many members reside) of patrilineage members. The double analytical focus which may be brought to bear on the kuwui, is, as mentioned above, that it is the aggregate of mawɛisia, and that its heads are typically patrilineally related; and in terms of land and property inheritance of a collective kind, it constitutes a descent group. As I am arguing here, it can also be seen to constitute or deploy as a descent group for the polarization of individual competitive aspirations on the social level, and this competitive group mobilizes as a ritual group or part thereof, aware of its characteristic identity as a kuwui, and as constituting part of a larger ndehũ.

We noticed the overlapping or linkage between descent groups due to marriage-ties, such that a congeries of descent group nuclei, or of the large proportion of members of various ndehũ, constitute a "village" - a single large rural town or an average sized village and several satellites.[1] Though the kuwui has some of the functions of a descent group, it is wider than the latter[2]

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[1] ta - 'town'; fula - 'village' are easier to distinguish lexically than by application. Mendes have a pride in their villages and though a man may refer to another place as a fulɛi, he almost invariably refers to his own village as a tɛi (sing. ta). The English word 'town' is not really appropriate when applied to rural Mende settlements which are rarely more than a few hundred strong. "ta" and "fula" are not always distinguishable by size alone. A section town (ta) may be smaller than some of its villages (fulɛisia), but probably owes its importance to historical factors, or sometimes simply to the choice of the Chief.

[2] Inasmuch as its membership includes affines, formerly slaves and perhaps non-related client families. Members may or may not have land rights in the kuwui, depending on their status as patrilineally related, or on the quality of their aggregation to the kuwui.

and a subdivision of the larger unit, the tɛi. These two units, the tɛi and the ndehũ provide the main loci of power and authority for which there is competition. This is not at all to deny the reality of positions of authority within the mawɛi and the kuwui, but simply to say that such authority shows up in greater relief against the village or descent-group organization.

This summary has been necessary to establish a point, but curtailed partly because of space and partly because much of the straightforward ethnographic detail can be found in print.[1] The point at issue is that we can distinguish three salient areas of competition for power and authority open to Mende people: they may compete at the village level (the village tɛi, with or without its satellites if it has any); at the level of the descent group or ndehũ; and at the level of individual initiative. At the village level competition is evident between mawɛisia, kuwuisia or various ndehũ, either based on recognition of kinship or independent of it - (for example, aspirations to village headman, court president, etc.); at the level of the ndehũ, competition would be rife between patrilineally related members for headships of mawɛisia or kuwuisia, perhaps Chiefdom Speaker or Chief, etc; and at the individual level, entrepreneurs could marshal support from village or ndehũ, or succeed through persuasion, flattery, industry, and generally the same kind of means as are available to any determined or influential person.[2]

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[1] Little, K.L. (1967) Ch.5.

[2] In the next two chapters we will distinguish other groups of a "competitive" nature in Horton's sense, and also see what scope the individual has, in attempting to acquire power and authority.

Various religious or cult groupings are also constituted in a way similar to the groups which are found at a social and kinship level and characterized by competition. And when we relate such groups to various ancestors, we can, I submit, understand something of the lexical and referential variety of terms for ancestors, thereby invoking Horton's thesis to explain the apparent redundancy of terms such as ndɔubla, habla, kɛkɛni, mamadani, ndebla and the rest.

Observed behaviour relative to ancestors, is not as random nor as ad hoc as it first appears. Some groupings are canonized, such that individuals have an obligation to participate. But since, as we have seen, any given individual belongs to a variety of social or kin-based groups, likewise in relation to ngafanga he will have obligations to various groups, both of the living, and of the ngafanga themselves. Again there are times when an individual may choose to participate in the activity of a group in which he enjoys membership, and there will always be opportunities for people to pursue their immediate self interest as an adjunct or alternative to the demands of a group.

As regards the ancestors, ndebla are distinct from kɛkɛni and mamadani, at least conceptually, since the former are distant ancestors whose lives are not remembered by the living, whereas the latter are relatively recently dead, and remembered to some extent in name and deed. Just as the Mende address their

prayers and offer their sacrifices to Ngewɔ though not always explicitly, likewise the ndebla are at least implicitly the focus of prayer and sacrifice. Sometimes they are explicitly and exclusively addressed; at other times the names of the kɛkɛni and mamadani are litanied. The questions which interest me are: what, if anything, determines which forms of address, and hence which ancestors, are involved; is there a pattern of relationships discernible between groups of living and groups of dead; and are the times and places of prayer and sacrifice a function of the putative relationship between the group and its ancestors?

It may be thought that after a lapse of time - a few generations at most - the kɛkɛni and mamadani become merged with the ndebla since one of the criteria for distinguishing these two groups is the time factor. A further condition or criterion is that kɛkɛni and mamadani are named ancestors and their coevals, while ndebla are unnamed and distant. But the kɛkɛni and mamadani will only merge with the ndebla when they have no survivors who can remember them: in other words, the relationship between the kɛkɛni (and mamadani) and the living is crucial to the definition of these particular ancestors. The kɛkɛni and mamadani exist for the living descendents who keep their memory alive, while the ndebla exist and function independently of the fact that the living have no specific, experiential knowledge of them. And here we have an important distinction which classifies kɛkɛni and mamadani on the one hand, and ndebla on the other, in relation to the living.

The Mende family, though dispersed is morally united; dispersal and death are part of the developmental cycle and the idea of the family survives them. The residential core is represented by a man and perhaps several of his brothers and their wives and children. One or other brother and perhaps most of the married sisters will have left the residential unit, but the senior male has moral authority - the right to respect and obedience - over the family as a whole, particularly in the case of "palaver" over debts, damages or "woman business". A father's curse is second only to that of a mother in fearsomeness, and competition between family members for leadership, favour and inheritance, must be played out without incurring parental disapproval. Just as the head of a family has the authority and duty to maintain order within the family, so a deceased household head will continue, as one of the kɛkɛni or mamadani to exercise authority in the shape of the use or threat of sanctions of a moral kind - those relating to the upholding of duties - and rewards and punishments which may be described as ethically 'good' or 'bad'. Fear of such sanctions is a powerful leveller controlling subordinates while the family head is still alive.

When someone has recently died and become an ancestor - one of the kɛkɛni of a family - the surviving family-head should cook rice indoors, and the immediate family comes together. The leader will then pray to the kɛkɛni and mamadani, calling their names. Each family (identified as mawɛi members), part of a kuwui or a ndehũ, is responsible for its own recent ancestors. They may

be addressed individually, or collectively as kɛkɛni and mamadani or more generally as bondɛisia, (family members) before the individual names are recited. Thus:

> "A bondɛisia, a gbɔ mu ma; ajifa wu mu lia wɔɔ, wu lewenga. Famia, mu wa ma wu gɔma, waa gbua mu gulɔ . . . "
>
> "O family members, help us, because you gave birth to us long ago, (and) you have passed (away). Therefore we have come before you, and do not pull away from us . . . "

The family, consisting of anyone who can trace a kin relationship with the kɛkɛni or mamadani, will mobilize for prayers and sacrifice. Should a larger group be at risk, perhaps due to prevalent sickness or infant deaths or such like, then several families may invoke their collective kɛkɛni and mamadani, and likewise an individual may feel he is serving his interests in privately pouring libations or offering sacrifice, or publicly doing so on the recommendation of a tɔtɔgbɛmɔi or diviner who gauges that they have been neglected in some way.

Relationships between family members are often simply interpersonal and not a function of group relationships: thus between parent and child or between siblings. There is a kind of continuity in these relationships as well as reciprocity, such that they endure at least in some aspects, after the death of one of the parties. Hence as one depends on one's father for life, protection and beneficence of a moral and physical kind, so after his death one depends on his good graces for safety and success: and as one owes respect and obedience to one's father while he is alive, so, when he is dead one must continue to give him the consideration that is his due, in making him gifts, asking his advice and retaining his benevolence. There is thus plenty of

scope for an individual to attract the favour of specific ancestors.

Frequently it seems to the observer that prayers to ancestors are of a general-purpose kind: as if the Mende are leaving nothing to chance, by calling on their own and everyone else's kɛkɛni, mamadani and ndebla. This blurs our picture somewhat, yet is consistent with the pragmatism of the Mende which we will see increasingly, and it still allows us to discern what I think is the basic conceptual attitude informing Mende behaviour towards their ndebla as distinct from their more recent ancestors. If the ndebla are those ancestors with the widest and most inclusive clientèle, drawn from related members of all the ndehũ in a local community, the kɛkɛni and mamadani are those with the most particular and exclusive clientèle, drawn from relatively recent descendents, who worship on the individual or family level (or perhaps in groups composed of discrete families) but not tied to any particular locality. And the ndebla are controllers of social sanctions, while the more recent ancestors control moral sanctions, a state of affairs consistent with the fact that kɛkɛni and mamadani will have descendants who are dispersed, while the group which prays to the ndehũ is a local group and more subject to social sanctions. The reason for this is that the ndebla represent not the interests of individual families but those of the community as a whole. The descent group is known as the nde or the ndehũ; the ancestors of the village or local group, ndebla: there is undoubtedly a correspondence between these terms. Hũ means 'in', 'inside' or 'under', and ndehũ can be freely translated as "those sharing birth" or "the begetters", as

nde also means 'to give birth', 'produce', hence 'speak' or 'say'. One can refer to parents as ndebla, when they stand not for individuals but for "the people who produce (the lineage)", as well as using ndebla for more distant forebears; and the product of these is the ndehũ.

Among those ancestors called ndebla are all the distant forebears of those living in any given local community. Now relationships between co-villagers are, on an important level, relationships between groups as distinct from merely individualistic familial relationships. The ndebla ancestors, as representatives of the constituent lineages of a village are involved , as they were when alive, with the creation and maintenance of social relationships, (just as conceptually the kɛkɛni and mamadani are seen as those involved in the maintainance of inter-familial relationships of a moral order) as well as the promotion of alliances and stability between kin-groups whose members become affines in other groups. The lineage elders while alive are concerned with "palaver" involving bridewealth payments or repayments, and various rights and obligations of a social nature. It is unsurprising therefore and somehow condign that the ndebla ancestors should retain special jurisdiction over social sanctions and be concerned with the social perpetuation of the village.

I think this is a valid analysis of the various spirits generally subsumed under the collective category "ancestors": Mende certainly differentiate sharply enough between kɛkɛni and mamadani, on the one hand, and ndebla on the other, even though it is difficult to find an informant who can produce a neat componential

analysis of the category. But the fact that most praying groups address Ngewɔ, ndebla, kɛkɛni and mamadani in an apparently random or all-inclusive fashion, does not destroy the point that Mende do distinguish between them and their areas of competence. Explicitly mentioned or not, Ngewɔ is addressed through the ancestors, and presumably people praying to ancestors will, if they are concentrating, be more immediately attentive to their nearest deceased relatives rather than the distant ndebla:[1] the rationale is simple:

> "If your own father is dead, before you can ask anything of Ngewɔ, you have to ask your father. You were born of a person who you hope is with Ngewɔ so you pray to him (beg him)."

The speaker here was a man who professed Christianity but was not formally instructed. Other people in that village were sure that a dead person was with Ngewɔ[2] rather than under the ground or in an underworld of any kind, though a distinction was made between Ngewɔ's isolated splendour, and the dead enjoying their existence as it were in the next room to Ngewɔ since "no one can actually sit with Ngewɔ", as one put it and others agreed.

It is impossible here to elaborate on the subject of prayers and sacrifices to ancestors: a few practical illustrations will have to suffice. Prayers and sacrifices used to be important for mobilizing groups and those groups can to some extent be seen

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[1] The point to emphasize here, is that on the individual level, a person will have certain duties to his deceased parents (tending the grave, libations, etc.), while on the level of the group, people address their prayers to their parents as members of the group of kɛkɛni.

[2] Though the informant claimed to be Christian in affiliation, he was speaking of 'traditional' Mende notions here.

in Horton's scheme as "competitive groups"; individual families, congeries of families, the members of a local community, men as opposed to women,[1] and individuals who particularly on their own farms, are free to supplicate ancestors and develop an essentially private dulia towards one deceased ancestor, or a group. But by and large kɛkɛni and ndebla are alike invoked and the form of prayers depends to a great extent on the hɛmɔi or prayer leader, who learns by experience how to formulate prayers, whom to include, and when to provide the opportunity for members of the congregation to add recommendations. One prayer leader, a young crippled man, said that he had been ordered by the Chief to lead the prayers and at first he had to make them up from what he could remember of previous occasions he had witnessed. He made several important points:-

– A day or two before important offerings, the ancestors have to be forewarned. A small group from the village, can go to the praying place and advise the ancestors of the day set for the prayers and sacrifice.

– The hill (or whatever place is the assembly point) is not addressed as Ngewɔ but the name of Ngewɔ is mentioned or intended.

– The ancestors are invoked, but the succour they provide is through the good graces of Ngewɔ.

– Women prepare rice and go towards the praying place with the men, but only the men pray, the women being congregated out of sight and sound of the praying group.

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[1] In the past, only men sacrificed; women had their own ceremonies in Sande bush. Now with Muslim and Christian influence - Ramadan prayers and Sunday services - the sexes tend to be mixed. But some important sacrifices in rural areas especially, are performed by men only.

> "On the first day, some of the men go, but they don't take rice. After the prayer they promise to take the rice after a few days. Then everyone can go to the bush with the rice, where they offer it and eat it (the remainder)."

The prayer, itself, on the appointed day, covers most contingencies and mentions Ngewɔ and the ndebla, as well as the recently dead (kɛkɛni and mamadani) under the title of bondɛisia. The bondɛisia (families) are mentioned both in terms of their recently deceased members and their living members, emphasising the fact that recent ancestors are regarded to some extent as (elder) members of the family.

> "A Ngewɔ wa, bi kpɔma yɛ mu ma, bondɛisia, kinii jisia ti tɛi ji hu, nuvu, ndopoa, nyahalenga, konyahanga, mu lɛi ji i li gulɔma, ndɔlei i li gulɔ. Nyaha aa kpundɛ ha wie, hindo aa namu tuwu ma, ndeblɛisia ti jahũ. Wu kpɔma yɛ mu ma na aa wie. A Ngewɔ, bi kpɔma yɛ mu ma, ndeblɛisia wɔɔ ti lewea, ti kpaya ve mu wɛ, kɔɔ Ngewɔ i pie ti kpaya ve mu wɛ kɔɔ ti gbɔ mu ma, mu bɛɛ, mu sabu maajɔɔ, mu gbatɛ."

> "O Great Ngewɔ may you help us, our families, the men of this town, the people, children, our daughters, the pregnant women. May our town progress. May our land progress. May our wives not die a mysterious death, and our men not fall from the palm tree, by the help of the ndebla. May you (ndebla) help to see that these things do not happen. O Ngewɔ help us, and you ndebla, the ones who bore us long ago, may they give us power (so that) Ngewɔ make them give us (your) power to help us, so that we get good will and wealth."

It is difficult to find a prayer that illustrates so well the relationship between Ngewɔ and the ancestors. The ndebla are first invoked here in a piacular style: "let the ndebla not take vengeance by causing our women to die, nor our men to fall from palm trees". Ngewɔ is explicitly invoked to ensure this. Then

in another part of the prayer, the immediate ancestors are invoked (cf. p.134 supra), not in a piacular, appeasing style, not to prevent, but to create, positively to help. The ndebla are characteristically feared for the negative sanctions they might invoke, while the kɛkɛni are considered more capable of bringing good to the community. Again, the protective and constraining power of Ngewɔ, is invoked to promote the social well being of the living (which the ndebla uphold, even though they may threaten individuals in order to secure conformity to social norms):

> "O ndebla, O Ngewɔ bi gbɔ mu ma ndevui va, kia mu ndebla velia bi va, kɔɔ bi wasawa ti hũ. Mu bawo jɔɔ ndevui va" -
>
> "O (ndebla) ancestors, O Ngewɔ help us for life (preserve our lives) as our ancestors have begged you to do, so that your power[1] over them (is manifest). Let us recover for life (Let us prosper)."

In this prayer the living, calling upon the ndebla, address Ngewɔ to beg for life which the ndebla, are committed to integrating socially. The ndebla are asked not to punish individuals, while Ngewɔ is asked to ensure that the ndebla do not threaten individual life for the sake of the group, by way of sanction. The implication is that the ndebla have the power of sanction by exacting a life as a cautionary example to the group, and that the overall power of Ngewɔ is directed through the ancestors on to the community, thus indicating a closer relation between Ngewɔ and the ndebla than between Ngewɔ and the community, (though we did note that the individual in extreme cases has direct recourse to Ngewɔ).

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[1] This word - 'wasawa' is difficult. Though I was assured it means 'power', I can find no comparable use. sawa means 'rule', 'law', 'commandment', and this word may be intended, but syntactic problems remain and I am not happy with the English rendering.

What then, of Horton's hypothesis that in a social system characterized by marked competition at different levels, "every level will have its own set of cults distinct from all other levels in the system", and so on? I have used it here as a useful theoretical framework against which to examine Mende relations to their ancestors. It cannot be said to be satisfactorily demonstrated from the Mende data, so far presented,[1] perhaps because of the lack of precision in the phrase "markedly competitive", and perhaps because Mende behaviour patterns of two or three generations ago, were not what they are now, in regard to the ancestors. However, the hypothesis is a very helpful focus and has enabled us to distinguish between the relationship of certain ancestors to individuals, and of others to various social groups. We can attribute to the kɛkɛni and mamadani, a relationship with kin groups and a control over moral sanctions, and to the ndebla a relationship to larger residential, or community groups and a control over social sanctions. Beyond this we see the controlling authority of Ngewɔ at one pole, and man's approach to him through the mediation of ancestors, at the other. We see also how group values are maintained by the interaction between groups of living and groups of ancestors, and how individuals too, have scope for maintaining relationships with ancestors, - relationships which as it were "back up" the system and provide the individual (living) with access to ancestral blessings, and specific ancestors with the respect and remembrance befitting former relations.

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[1] But different data will be presented in the next two chapters, adding weight to Horton's thesis.

It should be now clearer what choices and constraints are effective in the relationship between men and one group of spirits, the ancestral ngafanga, and we conclude that these ngafanga are particularly related to groups of people, so that by their relations with ancestors, individuals maintain their position within a variety of groups, and are able to indulge in some choices as to which ancestors and likewise which groups demand priority of attention at different times.

The second major group of spirits is the jinanga, (sing. jinii), and it is to these that we now turn, with the same analytic framework as that used for distinguishing various ancestors, (fig. 8, p.100 supra).

3-3.4 Non Ancestral Spirits, the individual, and the group

NON-ANCESTRAL SPIRITS (JINANGA) — FIG. 8b

SPIRITS	NON-ANCESTRAL: JINANGA
related to the INDIVIDUAL	ndɔgbɔjusui tingɔi. tikpɔi njaloi. jɔwɔi tɛmuisia
related to the GROUP	tumbuisia

The point has already been sufficiently established, that "the dead" is not an undifferentiated category to the Mende: that in relating to various spirits he is faced with a range of possibilities,

duties and choices: and that the playing out of these has repercussions in different areas of life. It will not need such length to establish the same point with regard to Mende and their non-ancestral spirits; nor is this relationship as important to the present thesis.

As can be seen from a glance at the above diagram, the non-ancestral spirits[1] relate primarily to individuals, and a further important difference from the ancestors, is that whereas the ancestors are predictable, and maintain social and moral values, the jinanga are less predictable, more individualistic, and more socially disruptive.

Ndɔgbɔjusui[2] The name here is a reference to the 'bush', which is the habitat of the spirit: an important point, since whereas ngafanga are associated with the village and its welfare, the jinanga are characteristically encountered beyond the village and belong outside it - a point emphasised if a deformed child is born, and the people, seeing it as the work of malevolent

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[1] Little, K.L. (1967) p.218, defines "Spirit" as a generic concept composed of four categories. This seems to me too simplistic, since the Mende distinguish generically and not just specifically, between ancestors and other spirits. However, I am unable to prove this satisfactorily. What I do here, is to use the word ngafanga primarily with reference to ancestral spirits, and use other words for all non-ancestral spirits (with words compounded of ngafa and an adjective, where necessary). Words like 'spirit', 'devil', 'medicine', 'society', and other key terms, are all inadequate renderings of Mende concepts and are mainly due to non-Mende influence. The Mende will refer to things by English words because they have learnt (falsely) that such English words are appropriate. Not only are they not appropriate very often, (cf. 'devil', 'ghost', 'fetish', 'medicine') they do not represent the Mende interpretation, but have been forced or borrowed.

[2] Innes. G. (1970) gives ndɔgbɔyosoi which gives the same pronunciation, via a different orthography. I prefer ndɔgbɔjusui < ndɔgbɔ = "bush", "semi-forest"; susui/jusui = "deep", "recess", which is where ndɔgbɔjusui is found.

spirits, say "the evil spirit has invaded the village". Then by recourse to the Humɔi society whose main function is to maintain the correct relations between bush and town, the child is killed by fire and the ashes rubbed on the women - a ceremony wide open to a structural analysis[1]. This takes place in the bush, yet in a place cleared of all vegetation.

Ngewɔ is acknowledged creator of the various spirits of the bush, and all other spirits who are not ngafanga,[2] and some Mende, prepared to speculate, maintain that men had communication with such spirits prior to the date at which they started to venerate ancestors - presumably on the logical grounds that jinanga existed from the beginning and thus predated the ngafanga, who first had to be born, then die, then be translated across the water. The spirits in the bush however, are not venerated in any social sense: they are dangerous, mischievous and definitely ngafa nyamuisia - "bad spirits". This designation is definitely not a Mende categorization however, since the Mende, perplexed somewhat over the metaphysical problems raised by the existence of such beings, say, when pressed, that though they are indeed nyamuisia "bad" they are not simply ngafanga.[3] This seems a purely external classification,

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[1] C.S.Sp. (F.) 1930.

[2] He is of course creator of ngafanga too, except that He first created them in another form and they passed through death and across the water. Harris, W.T. and Sawyerr, H. (1968) p.24.

[3] Hence the general word jinanga: the Mende want to keep apart the notion of ancestral spirits (ngafanga) and mischievous spirits (jinanga), and are consequently not happy to call the latter ngafanga without qualification. This is why I believe the Mende do not hold "spirit" as a generic concept with four categories. There is a spiritual principle in everyone, but not everyone "has a spirit". To say that someone "has a spirit", is tantamount to saying that he has a bad spirit in the sense of an unusual development of the spiritual principle. Ancestral spirits are per se good; all other uses of spirit contain the implicit reference to bad,

(cont.)

certainly Christian, and perhaps Muslim. "The Holy Spirit", third person of the Trinity, is rendered Ngafa Yekpei, "the good spirit". Mende must have been told by various outsiders, that other spirits were "bad", and indeed they compromise and commonly call non-ancestral spirits "devils", whereas their ancestral spirits are never referred to in such a way. Ndɔgbɔjusui is thus a "spirit" in the widest sense, not a ngafa, and not good.

He may however appear benevolent to individuals. He appears in human form, though some Mende say he is very hairy or has other exaggerated human physical attributes. If it has made a compact with an individual, ndɔgbɔjusui is believed able to venture into a town to sleep, but would not be recognized as such. It tries to enter into a compact with someone for several years: the individual will receive riches, luck, women, prestige, in return for a Faustian-type[1] pact, the details of which vary according to the imagination and experience of the informant. Ndɔgbɔjusui may gain control over his client, and if he does so, he will take him away to the deepest part of the bush and hold him in thrall. If the client eventually does escape back to the village, he will be "crazy": a cautionary tale, but sufficiently spicy to tempt the selfish or the gullible.

Mende informants are not reluctant to talk about spirits, but one suspects that their knowledge is scanty and that many of the questions put to them, are irrelevant.[2] But one curious point which

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[3] (cont.) mischievous, frightening, anti-social, and so on, as a characteristic of behaviour. The ancestral spirits cannot be 'bad', they are the upholders of social and moral sanctions for the community.

[1] Faust, in the German legend, sold his soul to Mephistopheles in return for riches.

[2] Similarly, questioning a missionary about the size, shape, means of locomotion etc. of an angel, is tendentious and sterile. Such definitions or explanations as one would get, would more likely be in terms of the action or effect of such spirits, rather than a crude description.

I cannot satisfactorily explain concerns the difference between ndɔgbɔjusui and other jinanga. People who see jinanga of various kinds, are said to "have a witch". In other words, unless they were already somewhat mentally disturbed or consciously involved[1] in hɔna hinda - 'witch business' - they would not be able to see such manifestations. But this does not apply to sightings of ndɔgbɔjusui. Anyone may see the latter and it is up to him to resist the blandishments or succumb. The temptation to succumb and gain temporary wealth and power, is balanced only by the presence of mind of the individual, who should know that no good will come from the association in the long term.

tingɔi njaloi

These spirits are to be found in the waters, in deep pools, rivers or in secluded or dangerous places. They are documented by Little, who also makes the point that "broadly speaking, relationships with the genie category of spirit, are on a personal rather than on a social basis and involve no regular cult of worship and propitiation, as in the case of the ancestral category".

There are apparent exceptions - of which Little cites one - which seem to show that these spirits also relate to the group. This is more apparent than real however. While it is

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[1] Mende distinguish between "disturbed" people who see jinanga, (who are regarded as involuntary witch hosts), and voluntary witches: the former are less maleficent to society than the latter, but since one can never be sure in a particular case which kind of witch is operative, all people suspected of witchcraft are feared.

[2] cf. Harris, W.T. and Sawyerr, H. (1968) pp.45-46.

[3] Little, K.L. (1967) pp.222-3.

[4] loc.cit. 223.

true that the people of a locality may congregate to placate an 'evil' spirit, they do so as individuals, each out to safeguard himself. The spirit may be believed to take a victim each year, but the Mende see this as random vindictiveness on the part of the spirit, who exacts token vengeance when individuals do not show sufficient fear and respect. The Chief may summon all the people to make sacrifice near the spot in the river which is particularly dangerous and regarded as the abode of a spirit, but Mende are quite clear about the difference between this placation of a capricious spirit, and the truly social behaviour required in ancestral sacrifices. Bad spirits thus do not exercise social or moral sanctions but selfish, individualistic reprisals.[1]

tingɔi appears variously as a snake- or fish-like creature with a human head. It is seductive and beautiful,[2] with long hair which it combs, and a mirror into which it looks. It holds the promise of great riches but also the threat of servitude or death. If a person who sees it pays no heed, he risks the anger of the spirit: if he accedes to the spirit's charms, he is caught in a web which seems impossible to escape: short term riches inevitably lead to one's downfall.

njalɔi is like a siren whose light attracts and confuses fishermen. The authors disagree as to whether it is male or

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[1] Though the fear of possible reprisals by spirits, can act as an indirect or negative social sanction. But the non-ancestral spirits are regarded by Mende people as anti social beings.

[2] Harris, W.T. and Sawyerr, H. (1968) pp.39-41.

female,[1] but my informants were neither agreed on its sex nor on the nature of its promises and threats. It is likely that such spirits can assume the form of either sex, that they enter into a sexual compact with those they ensnare, and that their promises are variable to some degree. Such spirits are associated with individuals rather than groups and they offer opportunities for aggrandizement, sexual gratification, and escape from the humdrum of daily life.

There are other spirits, some well known, some localized and unnamed. But previous writers have provided many of the ethnographic data: here we indicate something of the characteristics of some of the jinanga and demonstrate their relation to individuals.

Hofstra[2] makes two points which need some comment and updating, however. He says

> "it would probably be right to state that the relation between human beings and jinanga bears a somewhat incidental character, at least when compared to the relation of Mendi to their ancestral spirits[3]",

and that jinanga appear less frequently (1942) than they used to.[4]

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[1] cf. Little, K.L. (1967) p.223, says he is male.
Hofstra, S. (1942) p.176, says njaloi is female.
Harris, W.T. and Sawyerr, H. (1968) p.41, agree with Hofstra.
- But a person who has a witch is believed to have a sexual partner of the opposite sex, extremely attractive sexually. This applies whether the witch person is male or female, young or old. I think, judging from Mende attitudes, that they attribute to non-ancestral spirits, the sex and characteristics which complement their own, one reason why, though feared, such spirits are the subject of so much concern and speculation.

[2] loc.cit.

[3] loc.cit. p.176.

[4] loc.cit. p.177.

In the first place I have tried to show that Mende relations to jinanga are comprehensible in terms of the wider framework of their relations to the world as a whole; they provide man with choices and access to the spiritual world which is a manifestation of a more remote deity. To say that the relationship is "somewhat incidental" is begging the question of the place of jinanga in Mende belief and thought; almost by definition, relations with jinanga are kept secret and publicly censured. The incidence of such relationships is, it seems, less important than the Mende awareness of jinanga and the social implications thereof.

As to the information that jinanga are now less frequently apparent than formerly, there is one area where this is patently not the case. In educational establishments, particularly secondary schools, pupils experience the ostensible effects of a jina on one or other of their number - a phenomenon which expatriates meet from their first days in the classroom.

Jinanga are commonly blamed for individuals' oddities and unpredictability; and in those situations which to the observer are particularly productive of stress - unlawful pregnancy, debts, failure in examinations, approaching examination and many others - an unexpected outburst of emotion leading to a person's being noticed, respected, given sympathy or sick-leave, and so on, may be explained as the "attack" of a jina. In some cases I have seen, the "patient" seemed completely disorientated and convinced of the constraining influence of an outside agency, sometimes with vivid descriptions of its manifestation. Such relations with jinanga are more public than those with tingɔi, njaloi, and others, but none the less individualistic,

and if today's idiom is not that such jinanga bring actual riches, sexual partners or fame, they certainly put the "visionary" on centre stage for a short time, during which he or she is treated with consideration, sympathy and new respect. In my analysis of jinanga as providing such amenities to individuals - which cannot be obtained in the same way from ancestors - jinanga are by no means incidental, and whether consciously entertained or not, such relationships are provided for in Mende 'traditional' thought. In recent times of decreasing communal reverence of the ancestors, experiences of jinanga are perhaps assuming a new sociological significance as an institutional outlet for individual aspirations in situations of rapid social change, decreasing moral and social solidarity, and the shift from collective to individual responsibility, and ascribed to achieved status.

A final illustration of the relationship between jinanga and individuals, of a more "traditional" nature, and from contemporary rural Mende country, is the following account:

> "The tɛmuisia are spirits, and they appear to people. If a person comes across one, he might make a place for him and bring him home to his house. They look like small humans. Some people used to put them in a box and feed them. They are like the tumbuisia, but the tɛmuisia are not human. You would come across them at night, not during the day. People used to take them for swearing, (sɔndu; official oath or 'swear'). If you kept one and someone wanted to swear, they would go to the Paramount Chief and get permission, before coming to you. Then you would take them along for that particular day, to swear. The tɛmuisia can only escape from you if you violate their laws. They themselves will tell you what their laws are; what they like and what they don't like.

> They come to you in the first place because they like you. They are evil spirits[1] so you yourself must be somehow bad. You then have to take instructions from them.
>
> If you have them, you need money to feed them, so if you want to 'swear', you can tell people you have tɛmuisia. Thus you can get money. People will be afraid to accuse you, because you have those spirits. Others can't see them."

Enough has now been said, and complementary material is available in print, to establish my thesis that the jinanga are characteristically associated with individuals, providing opportunities and choices leading to a participation in the supreme power of Ngewɔ, since the spirits in general are manifestations of this power and more accessible than their source, Ngewɔ. Spirits are relevant to everyday life, have to be treated according to established conventions, and are intrinsic to Mende notions of causality. But there remains one group which does not fit our classification so far,[2] and is the object of some confusion among ethnographers of the Mende.

Although, as we saw, people mobilize in a group on tumbuisia occasion, to placate tingɔi or njaloi, they do not mobilize as a group. Relations with tumbuisia however, are different; the group is involved as a group.

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[1] ngafa nyamuisia; lit. "spirit(s) - bad". These refer to spirits who are potentially bad; i.e. they help the individual to more than he would be otherwise entitled, and they are also jealous and powerfully vindictive when necessary. ngafa nyamui is a weak description: it does NOT simply distinguish them from the ancestors, since the opposite of ngafa nyamui is ngafa yekpei and the ancestors are not called this: they are simply called ngafei. Ngafa yekpei is a neologism for "Holy Spirit" and I suspect ngafa nyamui may be likewise a neologism due to Christian or Muslim influence, contrasting (putatively powerful) ngafa yekpei with (putatively powerless) ngafa nyamui, rather than a true Mende classification, as Hofstra seemed to think. Hofstra, S. (1941) p.189.

[2] I have not tried to give an exhaustive list; those I have omitted, fit my scheme, cf. dzɔwei and tikpɔi in: Harris and Sawyerr (1968) pp.41-2.

Jɛ̨drej[1] conflates tɛmuisia (spirits) and tomboyeisia "deserted villages". Little[2] refers to tombuisia as aboriginal "owners of the country", dwarfs. Harris[3] seems to understand tɛmuisia as the equivalent of Little's tombuisia, and Hofstra speaks of neither in his account of non-ancestral spirits.[4]

My informants certainly distinguished tɛmuisia from tumbuisia, largely on the grounds quoted above, that the former were invisible to most people, gregarious, not-human; while the latter, though not seen directly, were not created as pure spirit, but were originally human or humanoid.[5] The ordinary word for dwarf in Mende is tumbui, whereas Innes gives tomboi for abandoned village. I use tumbuisia to apply both to the original (dwarfs) owners of the country as well as deserted villages - and incidentally to apply to ordinary Mende dwarfs of whom Mende have no fear and do not confuse either with the original dwarfs, or with manifestations of spirit. The reason for this usage is that Mende informants explained this as their own understanding. The spirits I refer to as tumbuisia have strong associations with abandoned villages - which is one reason why a house will not be pulled down, but allowed to fall

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[1] Jɛ̨drej, M.C. (1974) p.41.

[2] Little, K.L. (1967) p.225. He does not mention tɛmuisia.

[3] Harris and Sawyerr (1968). They do not mention tombuisia.

[4] Hofstra, S. (1942).

[5] The Mende themselves did not express this human/humanoid distinction, but while saying the tumbuisia were not Mende but really alive prior to Mende settlement, added that they were small in stature. The tumbuisia venerated today are the spirits (ngafanga) of these first people, yet not in the same class as Mende ancestors.

down. A written source of 1930, records Mende opinion in the following way, and my own findings were completely confirmatory:

> "The fallow or cultivable land used to be occupied by the tumbuisia who used to live in the woods and caves, and did not worry much at all about building dwellings or sowing a land which by its own produce provided them with sufficient to live on. These simple people are believed to have given their name to the ruined mounds all over the land, ruins which go by the well known name of tumbu. Even today, Mendes and other peoples of Sierra Leone invest the grottoes and caves with a profound respect, for are not the tumbus the true resting places of the "shades" - "tumbus" - and are not these shades themselves ('manes') the only guardians and legitimate protectors of this land of which they were the first occupants and over which they remain forever the real proprietors? The actual present-day occupants do not in any way consider themselves to be the owners (propriètaires) of the land, but simply the usufructers, and it is this which explains the great care which they take over propitiatory offerings and sacrifices which precede every new "brushing" and every new exploitation of the bush for their personal use. It is first necessary to obtain the authorization from, and pay tribute to, the legitimate overlords."

In our overall scheme the tumbuisia seem to be midway between ancestors and non-ancestral spirits such as ndɔgbɔjusui. Ancestors are humans who have reached a new status and exercise sanctions over the towns and townspeople. Ndɔgbɔjusui is not human and active in the bush. Tumbuisia are in a sense proto-human and hold sway over

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[1] C.S.Sp. (F.) 1930, the orthography /tumbuisia/ is in the original.

the cultivable land, as opposed to the deep bush or the town.[1] And tumbuisia seem to have no relationships with individuals, but only with groups of people who farm land: not fixed groups, but changing groups in different places and at different times.

So there is some confusion between tɛmuisia and tumbuisia I believe: and whereas the former are not human (p.150 supra) - and I have evidence that tɛmuisia are believed to go in groups of about half a dozen, and will surround and beat people for no good reason except that they are volatile and mischievous, - the latter are respected and believed to have predictable habits and rights which people must respect or the group will suffer, through bad harvests. I therefore distinguish between tɛmuisia as mischievous and related to the individual, and tumbuisia as possessing clear rights and sanctions over the group for the maintenance of those rights.

This chapter has been an attempt to understand how the power of Ngewɔ is mediated to mankind through spiritual agencies, and to see to what extent this part of the Mende religious system reflects social organization and institutions. We have identified

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[1] There are what could be called "accommodated" spirits: not strictly ancestral, yet once human beings. Briefly, the situation is this: death normally takes place on the family land, and if not death, then burial should be on the family land. Among the ndɔubla are those who died and remained far from home, perhaps falling in battle. One buried on "foreign" soil, cannot be regarded as an ancestor in the full sense. I was provided with an interesting example. "In Bumpe, the Temnes fought to the last man against the Mendes, the last warriors drowning themselves rather than surrender. Since then they have been accepted as [accommodated] ancestors of the town [by virtue of their prior claim]. They are regarded as retaining rights of ownership analogous to those held by the tumbuisia. A new Paramount Chief must offer them sacrifice, announce to them his election, and ask for their protection just as though they were 'ndehũ'." [Rev. J. Gilroy, C.S.Sp.]

two major groups of spirits, ancestral and non-ancestral, and two categories of people, groups and invididuals. We have seen how social and moral values are maintained through the deployment of a variety of groups with different interests and a variety of manifestations of the spirit of competitiveness. We saw how, through his incorporation into such groups the Mende is socialized into the world of the living, and related to the spirits and the power of Ngewɔ which they represent. Certain spirits back up the socially important groups and through their powers of social and moral sanctions not only maintain the groups in relation to each other, but also situate the individual in relation to his group. The self interest of groups of people is maintained without being allowed to become socially disruptive or a threat to other such groups.

As for the individual, his interests are not totally submerged in those of his group, since there remain for him both dangers and opportunities, provided by other spirits. His individual competitiveness or cupidity may be satisfied by a chance encounter with a non-ancestral spirit and though this is rare, one supposes, nevertheless it does occur, and there are yet other ways in which a person can pursue his entrepreneurial ambitions if he dare. These we will deal with in the next chapter.

The scheme outlined in fig.8 (p.100 supra) systematizes the world of the spirits both in relation to Ngewɔ and in relation to men, and provides a visual clue to the ways of understanding Mende behaviour relative to spirits.

My thesis is that Ngewɔ operates in the world through two main channels: spirits and "Power". The latter term we will deal

with in the next chapter, but before doing so, it is important to point out that Ngewɔ shows that he is active in the world, and communicates with men through other media which defy quite such easy classification.

If we look at the position an ordinary Mendeman is in during his lifetime, we can appreciate his ambitions and begin to understand how, in the pursuit of the satisfaction of these ambitions he sometimes succeeds and sometimes fails. The Mende sees evil, sickness and myriad problems, and attributes the existence of these to antisocial agents or the antisocial use of "power" by human agents. Thus, though anything Ngewɔ made is basically good, it can be used for evil ends, and evil is personified in some spirits who are the corrupters of the world of nature, or else seen as the sway of uncontrolled selfishness over the legitimate aspirations and demands of the group. Every Mende has legitimate access to the "power" of Ngewɔ either as an individual or as a member of certain groups. However, as a free agent he can overreach his legitimate claims and use power for evil or anti-social ends. Without "power" at birth, the Mende needs it during life. The acquisition of such power is one main ambition.

But there are some who are born with "power". This is an anomalous situation[1] and a mark of their specialness. As such, these people are communicators between Ngewɔ and the generality of mankind.

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[1] Anomalous simply by comparison with the generality of cases, in which people acquire or are invested with 'power' only gradually. The reason I call some manifestations of spirit, anomalous, while leaving the jinanga outside of that category, is that with regard to jinanga, Mende know where they stand and can usually choose whether or not to enter into a compact with them, with the consequences that implies. The 'anomalous' spirits on the other hand, must be treated according to prescribed ways. The 'returning child' which we shall see in the following chapter, must be treated according to fixed rules, and the monstrous birth must be destroyed (cont.)

A second ambition is to become a proper ancestral spirit with the ceremony of tenjamɛi after death. Without this, one remains among the ndɔubla, not fully an ancestral spirit, and not at peace. There are some, however, who are born with an unusual spirit: stronger than that of the generality of human kind, yet neither classifiable as ancestral nor as non-ancestral in the scheme we have used. The Mende see them as strange and remarkable, and vehicles of communication between Ngewɔ and humanity. How these anomalous births fit into the scheme can be seen if we construct a new scheme, fig. 10.

SPIRITS AND ANOMALOUS SPIRITS — FIG. 10

SPIRITS IN GENERAL	NGAFANGA	JINANGA
Anomalous Spirits	Munda: jiilo: ji ta: lombe: kɔnɛ manu etc.	deformed births "monsters"

I have included a group of anomalous spirits on the same vertical axis as the ancestral ngafanga, since like the ngafanga they exist on the edge of the social world. Like the ngafanga, these anomalous spirits relate to groups of people.

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[1] (cont.) immediately, according to the Mende people. In the next chapter we shall record other instances of anomalies (particularly twins), analogous to those adduced here; this suggests a certain balance in the overall scheme.

On the other hand, I have made some association between jinanga and monstrous or deformed children. I am not so much comparing like with like, as saying that the Mende react to "anomalous spirits" analogously to ancestral ngafanga and likewise their reaction to deformed or monstrous births bears some analogy to their reaction to jinanga: fear, the desire to escape or be removed from the danger.

These anomalous manifestations of spirit in the world of men must be dealt with under the rubric of "spirits" since, though the Mende recognize them as born of human parents who are not yet ancestral spirits, it is their spiritual rather than their physical 'abnormalities' which are of particular significance to the Mende.

Twins, which may be thought of as equally anomalous, will be dealt with later, since they are not so much an anomalous manifestation of spirit, as an anomalous manifestation of "power": and one indication that the physical "abnormality" of multiple births is not the most important criterion, in that the attribution of twinness does not depend on there being more than one child in the womb; a curious and interesting problem.

3-3.5 Anomalous Spirits, the individual and the group

I will argue in this section that anomalous spirits of the kind to be discussed are 'communicators' between Ngewɔ and mankind, just as are the ancestral and non-ancestral spirits, and that it is the "spiritual" element in their makeup which fits them for this task, consistent with the thesis that spirits in general are intermediaries between Ngewɔ and mankind. The Mende of course

recognize that each person has some kind of spiritual principle, which distinguishes a body - kahui - from a corpse - pomɛi, by the presence in the former of life, ndevui. And since they believe in an afterlife while acknowledging that corpses rot, the spiritual principle has a close relationship to ndevui. But when a Mende uses the word ngafa he means much more than ndevui. Thus, ordinary people have the right or normal balance between body and life, but a ngafei refers to that entity which has a principle of "life", yet related in quite a different way to "body", from ordinary human beings. It is this concept of ngafei which is important to the Mende, since they know perfectly well that when one refers to a ngafei one is talking about a spiritual agent quite different from a human being. Thus while admitting that each person has a spiritual principle, the Mende are not happy about using the term ngafei to refer to the spiritual principle of living humans, since ngafei implies some independence of the world, which an ordinary human does not have. Hence, if one said "X has a ngafei", it means that X is 'dominated' or 'possessed' by a spirit, rather than as we might say "people have souls". Ngafei is thus powerful and anomalous if too noticeable in humans.

We analyzed several groups of ancestor ngafanga, - powerful spirits who were once human beings but have passed over the water and enjoy a new mode of existence. Ancestors act in predictable ways to bind together the human community. But this is not to say that everyone knows all there is to know about them. If something goes wrong - sickness, death, ill-luck - perhaps an ancestor or group is the cause; the Mende have to try and determine

this, and to see if they may have offended some ancestor(s). For this, official "interpreters" - diviners - may be patronized. These we consider later.

Basically, relationships with ancestors are an extension of ordinary social relationships. To the ancestors one may speak respectfully but directly. Food is prepared for them; their advice and protection is sought; reciprocity is practised, and to try to be sure of placating all ancestors, generalized and inclusive sacrifices are made, sometimes with the apparent aim of preempting ancestral pique. However, relations with the anomalous spirits we mentioned, are very different. These spirits inform new born children, but are restless and dissatisfied, and in leaving their hosts to seek another body, the host dies. This presents a major problem since new life to the human group is necessary, but high infant mortality or the death of the childbearers, as sometimes happens, is a heavy price, and spirits believed to be responsible have to be assuaged promptly and properly.

The "unborn", who may perhaps be informed by these anomalous spirits, represent to the Mende then, both danger and hope; new life to the group, but attendant risks; additional members of the community to work, marry and in turn produce children, but also dependents who need care and effort. The unborn are at once a vital link in the continuity of the local community and a drain on its resources. The community depends for its future on the control of its fertility, and consequently individuals must promote the interests of the community. One of the sanctions on self interest in regard to sexuality and fertility is the threat of sanctions in

terms of neo-natal deaths - deaths which the Mende interpret as a sign or communication from Ngewɔ that the community or some of its members, are at fault.

Ambivalence characterizes Mende attitudes to the unborn therefore, as it does their attitudes to the dead: and just as it is important to ensure that the dead are properly translated to the realm of the ancestral spirits, so it is important to ensure that infants are properly initiated into the world of human society. If this transition is not effected smoothly, the newly born as well as the newly dead may be a potential danger to the social group and particularly to their own family. If a woman, therefore, loses a succession of children, or if she gives birth to a deformed child, this is interpreted as due to some fault (in the first case) or due to an unsolicited act of evil spirits (in the second).

A pregnant woman is in something of a parlous position, physically, socially and ritually. The more advanced her pregnancy, the less active part she is able to take in her community, social, domestic or conjugal. At this time she is thought to be particularly vulnerable to the forces of evil, including attacks by witches who are believed to be sustained by the fresh blood of infants, pre- or neo-natal. The pregnant woman is thus dangerously liminal. Her physical state is important for the perpetuation of the group, and therefore socially desirable; yet she and her unborn child are potentially dangerous to that same community. She must be careful that her behaviour is correct, lest the community suffer through the possible death of herself or her child.

Though Ngewɔ is the author, sustainer and final arbiter of life, there are in the Mende view, not only the ancestral and non-ancestral spirits we have seen, but bad spirits whose existence is deduced from their effects on the human community; and there seem also to be spirits which, while not maleficent, are nevertheless unpredictable and ill-at-ease in the environment in which they exist. While the first such type may at least be attacked if identified, the second type can at best be mollified and the environment made more amenable.

The pregnant woman should thus ensure that she behaves correctly and is guiltless at the time of her confinement. If so, she should deliver a healthy child. But if problems arise, then she must have been guilty of some unconfessed crime, or perhaps been the target of witchcraft. Secondary elaboration of belief is extremely strong in this area.[1] Consequently the priority for the pregnant woman - and that of the community - is to ensure as far as possible that her wrongdoings are confessed and satisfaction made, so that she and her child are protected from external dangers. This is done by individual appeal to Ngewɔ and

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[1] In some communities - e.g. Navaho - ritual complexity may be invoked to account for failure of ancestors to fulfil the wishes of the community. This is not the case with the Mende: the rituals here seem fairly simple, but the number of groups to be placated or dangers to be removed, is large, and failure to achieve desired ends may be explained as due not so much to lack of ritual technique, as to having overlooked some potentially hostile group or individual. We saw the phrase kaye ii Ngewɔ ma, lit. "Confession is not on Ngewɔ", thence "Ngewɔ has nothing to be accountable for". Kaye is used most significantly to refer to the confession of lovers or other misdemeanours, that a woman makes prior to delivery. If the labour is difficult she is encouraged to confess more, lest the child be born dead or she herself die.

confession to the community[1] (particularly during labour itself, to the attendant midwives, who incidentally seem to derive great glee from exacting a confession of the woman's lovers, which provides them with invaluable knowledge about their own husbands and menfolk). The condition of being 'with child' creates responsibilities for the mother; the child is their cause. And in acquitting the responsibilities the woman and the community endeavour to reestablish harmony where this may have been impugned. Harmony - or the correct relations between people and the world of nature, and among people themselves - is regarded as the will of Ngewɔ. Thus the unborn child is a potential sanction from Ngewɔ, who uses this means as the instrumentality of his wishes.

The Mende belief is that a child will not stay with a family unless there is harmony and security there. The spirit of the child may often communicate with the mother, to make her prepare correctly for its birth.[2] If the domestic scene is not orderly, the child may die and its spirit return in subsequent children who will likewise die until what was wrong is discovered and rectified.

Mende seem to subscribe to the view that spirit is a strong and potentially dangerous power which has to be as it were domesticated in the new born. If not domesticated early on, that child will be volatile, unpredictable and demanding. The spirits

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[1] Certainly up to the 'fifties of this century, it was a frequent occurrence for women to be brought to the Mission hospital, suffering from a difficult delivery. Having been unable to deliver quickly they had been beaten ("to drive the devil out"), and were bruised from neck to ankles. Failing to give birth even after beating, they were brought to the hospital. (information from Rev. J. Gilroy, C.S.Sp.)

[2] See the section on the importance of dreams, infra.

of twins are regarded as particularly strong and a mother may leave the baby exposed in the sun during the day - known as "cooking the twin" - not to harm or kill it, but to subdue or "cook" its spirit so that the twin will be obedient and domesticated, rather than too demanding and individualistic.

After delivering her child, though she has already made a confession, the mother is still not safe, as someone might have "witched" her or put a "swear" or curse on her. She will probably be wearing whatever protective halei[1] she has obtained, and if a diviner was previously consulted, she will have carried out his instructions. Still, the child might die. Of itself this fact is not necessarily one which demands an unusual explanation: that children die is well-enough known and to some degree accepted as inevitable. Provided all reasonable precautions have been undertaken there is no need for recrimination or soul searching. If a second child likewise dies, there is cause for more concern, and a third successive infant death is regarded as unacceptable, very serious and in need of explanation. Assuming the mother has made a confession and taken all due care, yet the children continue to die, then it is believed that the spirit of the dead child is trying to communicate with the living, typically warning them to be more attentive to their individual and social duties, lest more children die, and a suspicion of witchcraft fall upon the family.

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[1] Halei is the subject of the next chapter.

If then, a first born child dies, the interpretation might be made that its spirit is unduly strong, and dissatisfied with the family into which it was born. Such a spirit must be carefully tricked to prevent it leaving the bodies of subsequent children, and if that does not work, it will be begged to remain. The important thing however, is to take notice of the 'sign' provided by the death of the first child, and prepare as carefully as possible for the successful reception of the next.

To this end the first child is buried naked and unceremoniously on the rubbish heap ka wɛ, in the belief that if this is not done, the woman will have no further issue or her subsequent children will die. The rationale seems to be that in burying the child on the rubbish heap and not in a proper grave one is trying to confuse its spirit so that it will not be waiting around to enter a later child. It is denied social identity and buried with the leaf called poma magbe meaning "to drive away (from) the corpse". Such a leaf may be used to swat flies which are attracted to a corpse, but a deeper purpose is served in that my information was that such a leaf would, as it were, cause the corpse itself to be driven away, so that a spirit could not remain associated with it. Before burial, marks would be made on the corpse. Most commonly a stalk or splinter would be pushed under one or some of the finger nails; an ear might be pierced, or marks with a knife (small cuts) would be made on the back. Then the next child born

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[1] A priori one might think that any leaf could be used to brush away flies. The poma magbe is special; the root is used as medicine for sickness, but otherwise the poma magbe has no practical use. It has no fruit, no edible parts, and even goats do not eat it.

would be scrutinized for such marks, and it appears that any birthmark on a new born child (particularly small discolouration of the finger nails) would be proof that the spirit of the first child had returned in the second, and the elaborate tricks had failed. In this case the child's spirit would be implored to settle down into the family, and assured of sympathetic treatment. And the child would be given a name which indicated that the family know it is a wandering spirit and beg it to remain. Such names are lombei - "stand/remain here"; munda - "our own one"; jiilo - "let this one remain"; jita - "this is the one"; kɔnɛ - "please, I beg"; manu - "forgive"; and so on.

Here is an account from one called Kɔnɛ, an educated, highly literate Mende, talking of "traditional" beliefs.

> "I am one of them. I died. They put a stalk through my ear [this man had a hole in his lobe, which he said nobody put there]. I am the ninth. All previous ones died, as well as the last one after me. I am called Kɔnɛ. They also put stalks in the fingernails. Sometimes they mark the body. I was about a month old when I died, and they were about to bury me when they made this mark. The spirit of the dead child has now returned to me. So, when I was reborn, the mark on the ear was already there. When they put the mark on you, they want you back, the same spirit. When the previous child dies it reaches Ngewɔ and returns in the next child."

The last part of this testimony shows the tension between the desire to trick and send away the spirit that brings death by leaving children, and the desire, once it has returned, to welcome it and induce it not to leave. But often a child will survive after the death of the previous one, and with no obvious marks on its body. This is attributed to the successful confusion of the original spirit, and the presence of a different spirit in the surviving child.

Not every first-born death would be attributed to this returning spirit; sometimes only when three consecutive children have died would the attribution be made. Consequently children buried on the rubbish dump were not necessarily first-born children only, but those first considered to be possibly animated by a returning spirit. Subsequent children to die would be buried properly and in fact clothed, since now the family know for sure, the cause of death, and cannot antagonize the spirit by burying the body without apparent respect. Some people say that when a child returns it can be remonstrated with - carefully - in these words "Now we recognize you. You have been a 'bad devil' (ngafa nyamui) going and coming. You have been marked and you have come again. You must not leave any more."

In the case of Kɔnɛ quoted above, nine children were all considered to be animated by the same spirit: but there may be other indications. Thus if a kɔnɛ or jiilo died, it could be attributed to other causes. Perhaps someone on the father's or mother's side had been a witch trying to "eat" all the children. Sometimes the grandparents would be told by the Diviner, tɔtɔgbɛmɔi, to make a sacrifice to show they were in no way ill-disposed towards the child, or a "swear" might be put, to catch any malevolent agent.

We have seen enough here to appreciate that in some cases the spirits within newborn children may be too strong or dominant, and that in such cases, Mende see such spirit activity as a communication ultimately from Ngewɔ, which leads to a concerted effort to improve social and family relations. The association of liminality and spirit activity has been noted with regard to the potentially

dangerous ndɔubla; here is a further indication, and this incidence will reoccur. The spirits considered in this section affect the lives of individuals - particularly the mother but also anyone who might be ill-disposed to the family: they are pressured to confess or desist. Likewise they affect the behaviour of the group, leading to greater social solidarity and the strengthening of ties of concern and cooperation within the family.

The final case of spirit activity from within the human community, and the final instance of such activity seen as representing the communication between Ngewɔ and mankind leading to social action, concerns the birth of deformed children. I myself obtained no direct evidence of this, and the attendant practices are certainly in desuetude these days, but since the case is important to my thesis, I quote from a missionary record composed after experience at first hand, and contemporary evidence. The case was recorded in the 1920's. Two important points of hermeneutics: I translate from the French text, which includes references to "the devil", which means ngafa nyamui.[1] Secondly, I retain the asides of the original record, as part of the flavour of the account.

> "If a child in delivery causes its mother's death, it will necessarily die itself, since it is a devil. There is another circumstance in which a ridiculous battle is waged between the women and the bad spirits; a cruel, deplorable and tragic battle. It is when it is necessary to repudiate beyond the boundaries of earthly life, those unhappy little babies which nature produces as deformed and which our depraved and superstitious women are at pains to transform into angels of darkness and spirits (genies) of perdition. The deformed child is considered by the Mende, as the work of bad spirits. What can I say? It is considered

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[1] See note 3, p.144, and note 1, p.151, supra.

as a spirit itself, trying to insinuate itself among mortals in order the more freely to perpetuate crimes, disorders and vengeance, which its dissolute nature instinctively tends to commit. It is necessary therefore to slam the door on it and to get rid of it by that most radical means, fire.

Here is what transpired at —— , only four hours walk from Moyamba. A young woman gave birth to a deformed child. With the speed of light the news spread across the countryside that such and such a woman had given birth to "the devil". "The devil", people from all parts were shouting, "has invaded the village." Quickly and promptly people had to assemble to oust it beyond the town, or else great ill fortune would fall on the countryside without delay. So messengers were quickly despatched in all directions, charged with announcing the terrible news and with urgently mobilizing all the women. During this time, declared impure, the mother of the devil was confined to her house with the miserable fruits of her opprobrium. Having delivered a sermon and administered a "swear", the old woman of the humɔi society proceeded to the first exorcisms and bathed the suffering body of the tarnished woman. She calls on God[1] and the good spirits while exhorting the woman to a humble confession of her past sexual misdemeanours, in order to obtain complete pardon . . . One woman, the temporary leader went to the menfolk saying: "Men, it is for you that we are going to fight. As you already know, the devil has invaded our village. . . . We are going to stand fast and chase him away. But since we do so on your behalf, it is your duty to help us by loosing your purse strings. We count on your financial support to bring this battle to a satisfactory conclusion and to finish with a brilliant victory." The Chief acknowledged the validity of the request; a collection is fixed. "For the valiant people who are going to hunt the devil and so safeguard the well being of all, let everyone give his portion." The collection realized £2.10.0. . . . The women now dance with abandon. In the hubbub of cacophonous singing, you could hear hysterical shouts and

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[1] In the original, the word Ngewɔ is not used: the French reads simply "elle fait appel a Dieu".

> imprecations, and menacing threats directed at the poor child who had to be thrown out.
>
> The women moved into the attack. Their bodies were covered with mossy tunics; they were wearing girdles (garlands) of creepers; their heads were covered with greenery and they carried swords, cutlasses and sticks. As they moved, half delirious, they raised the noise of their shouts. Escaped from their men, who were formally forbidden from taking part in this tragi-comedy, the women took a small bush path into the bush, shouting as they went. Arriving at a newly brushed enclave, they stopped. The moment of the dénouement had arrived. In the middle of the empty space they lit a huge fire, and started dancing with shouts and imprecations. Suddenly on a sign from the leader, a pregnant silence fell, which emphasized the gravity of this, the most savage act possible. "There he is. The devil, and we will get a good grip on him this time", screeched an old woman as she held aloft in her shrivelled hands, the frail body of the new born child; "here is the wicked spirit that wants to kill us all. Do you see it? Well go then, perverse devil, go and warm your bones on the other side." And saying this, with a gesture of blind anger she twisted the child's neck and threw the body with a gesture of disgust, onto the fire, while all around echoed a thunderous applause and cries of victory. Lovely victory indeed, and how worthy of fetichism! The women stay where they are and now take precautions to prevent a future tragedy. After the fire is put out, the ashes of the little victim are gathered up carefully and distributed among the combatants who rub them over their bodies so that the devil will not be tempted again to use any of them as a vehicle of passage to this earth.
>
> These things are passing follies demanded by the ancestral cults. Ordinarily the disposition of our Mende people is calmer and more peaceful, as indeed are their customs."

Strip away the rhetoric and perhaps some gratuitous interpretation, and we have here a magnificent account which contains remarks on Mende belief as well as editorial comments, and adds an important and fascinating piece to the ethnographic puzzle.

It shows clearly that the world beyond the village is redolent with meaning for the village and community, and that spirit

activity of a rather obscene kind can be used for the benefit of the social group - in this case the whole village. Ngewɔ and the "good" spirits are invoked in this extreme case, which though rare provides institutionalized access to the Divinity and thence benefit to mankind.

This incident fits very well into our scheme suggesting that Ngewɔ is active through spiritual agencies and that the problem of evil can be dealt with according to the belief that whatever reverses may be caused in the short term, by spiritual agencies, can be rationally dealt with and institutionally controlled, to produce long term good.

The present section has been long, yet much has been omitted. We have enough however, to demonstrate the relationship between Ngewɔ and mankind through the mediation or instrumentality of spirits. The world and activity of spirits are seen as of the world of nature and not as a world of the totally-other.[1] The

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[1] The inference from examples cited, is that "spirit" and "body" are clearly distinct to the Mende. Spirit inheres in the body of men, women and children, but is only regarded as significant or remarkable in extreme or unusual cases: normally people simply take the existence of a spiritual part in man, for granted. It becomes important in terms of ancestorhood. People who die in childhood however, cannot be full ancestors, while those who have physical abnormalities (twins, deformed children) are thought likewise to have "spiritual" quirks, (except for dwarfs, who seem to be quite acceptable, perhaps because people think of the tumbuisia - autochthonous dwarfs - as originally 'normal' or 'natural'. If the spirit is considered odd, due to the physical abnormalities, steps must be taken. Thus, monstrous or deformed children are thought to have comparable spirits and thus have to be killed and burned; anomalous twins are accredited with specific spiritual characteristics, and weaklings who die in infancy are thought to have spirits who keep returning, since they cannot achieve maturity, i.e. ancestorhood, through children who die. I do not know if this is so, but speculate here, about possible correspondences between physical states and spiritual states.

spirits are seen to be organized and mobilized consistently and to help to uphold and maintain the social organization and values. Particularly important for later sections, we have indicated that the spirit world of the Mende, was balanced in relation to moral and social values and their promotion, and to individuals and groups. What this means is that if part of the system was attacked or repudiated by outsiders such as missionaries, on the grounds that some practices were acceptable (e.g. respect for the dead) and some reprehensible (e.g. belief in "devils", killing deformed children), this would be very likely to produce confusion and incomprehension on the part of the Mende people. To what extent this was the case, can be studied in due course, now that we have made an exposition of the spirits in Mende belief and thought.

Ngewɔ is in overall control of the spirits who are his messengers with men. But man has other access to the "power" or beneficence of Ngewɔ . "Power" which is not mediated through spiritual agencies will be the focus of the next chapter.

The analysis of Mende Belief and Thought has now provided us with fig. 11, which is an expansion of that part of fig. 7, (p.87 supra), concerned with Ngewɔ, Spirits, and Man.

NGEWƆ, MANKIND, AND SPIRITUAL AGENCIES — FIG. 11

NGEWƆ

C R E A T O R

C R E A T I O N

SPIRITS	ANCESTRAL AND SOCIAL:	NON-ANCESTRAL AND NON-SOCIAL
Related to the INDIVIDUAL	'Ngafanga' my mother - nya nje my father - nya kɛkɛ	'Jinanga' ndɔgbɔjusui tingɔi. tikpɔi njaloi. jɔwɔi tɛmuisia
Related to the GROUP	haabla ndɔubla kɛkɛni/mamadani ndebla	tumbuisia
Anomalous Spirits related to the GROUP	munda: jiilo ji ta: lombe kɔnɛ : manu etc.	deformed births - 'monsters'

MAN

CHAPTER FOUR:

NGEWƆ, MANKIND, AND 'POWER'

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NGEWƆ, MANKIND, AND 'POWER'

4-1 INTRODUCTION

A recent article on Mende land and spirits[1] contains the somewhat apologetic statement that "Mende culture as a whole may indeed show a remarkable lack of coherence". Admittedly the data from Mende history point to considerable diversity in the "culture as a whole" - a diversity which I argue has been synthesized into an eclecticism that is part of the Mende genius. In addition to historical factors traceable three centuries back and shared by the invaders from whom the Mende derive, there are also ecological, demographic, dialectal, geographical and other considerations which may be invoked to account for more recent diversification. But a "lack of coherence" is not at all the same thing as cultural diversity and diversification.

An exposition of the nature and range of halei is undertaken here, in order to show that there is much more coherence in the system than meets the eye. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, halei will be situated relative to ngafanga in the context of Mende belief and action. Having explicated the concept and importance of halei,

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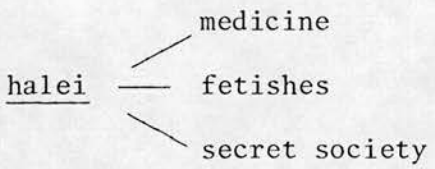
[1] Jɛ̣drej, M.C. (1974) p.38.

we will then be able the better to understand some of the tensions implicit and explicit, in relations between Mende and missionary.

Halei[1] has been the subject of semantic and categorial confusions.[2] The term appears in several contexts and has been described as: "a medicine"; "fetishes"; "a secret society".[3] As Little says, halei is usually translated as "medicine",[4] but he sidesteps the issue of whether it 'means' "a society", maintaining that it is a generic concept with different categories. Formally, these opinions could be presented thus:

(a)



This seems fundamentally clumsy and factually incorrect, since it suggests that halei 'means' several very different things, so that the problem of whether halei is polysemic, or of explaining the apparent confusion of the Mende, becomes a major issue for the ethnographer.

Such an issue is illusory and the fruit of an ethnocentric attitude to halei. Jędrej has, I think, come nearest to a solution in terms of his hypothesis that "each [referent] is a particular

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I use the definite singular form, halei. The usage hale is the indefinite singular form of the word.

cf. Jędrej, M.C. (1976a) p.248.

loc.cit.

Little, K.L. (1967) pp.227-8.

instance of what hale[i] is",[1] but the hypothesis is really unnecessary since matters are more simple and the confusion to be dispelled only exists in the mind of the observer.

Here is another hypothesis: a basic characteristic of Mende life, is that the people are concerned about halei - (sources of) power and protection - and about man's positioning himself in the world of individuals and groups so that he may meet life's challenges. Further, with European contact, Mende people were intrigued by things which seemed characteristically European and which were seen to some degree as the source of European power and protection, - things which the white man spoke of as his 'medicine'.[2] Now those things to which the Mende had access as sources of power and protection - his halei - became known in English as "medicines". But Europeans saw not only things which seemed like herbal remedies ("medicines"), but were aware of exotic 'fetishes' ("medicines"), also referred to by the Mende term halei. Herbal remedies were disregarded by Europeans as being largely harmless and perhaps ineffective, but the word 'fetishes' gained currency, and objects to which it applied were seen as curios or objects of superstition.

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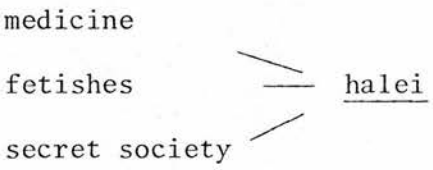
[1] Jęǧrej, M.C. (1976b) - In the MSS form of (1976a), Jęǧrej advances this hypothesis, omitted in the printed article. I wrote this present chapter before noting the omission in (1976a).

[2] Quinine for malaria was first used in Africa on W.B. Baikie's expedition up the Niger in 1857. This marked a vitally important control over perhaps the major cause of European deaths. With increasing contact between Europeans and the Mende, and the passage of time, a variety of medicines were part of the standard equipment of administrators and missionaries by the end of the nineteenth century. The first mosquito net used by Catholic missionaries came into the country in 1909 and was a major topic of conversation, worthy of note in the mission Journals of the time.

Some social groups, apparently referred to generically by the Mende people as halei, were christened "fetish societies" or "medicine societies" by Europeans who understood that halei referred (in Mende parlance) to 'fetishes' and 'medicines'. Hence the unitary concept halei (i.e. unitary to the Mende), was given three referents by non-Mende people, and created problems for later students.

But to pursue the hypothesis and give the Mende credence when they appear quite unconfused about the notion of halei, let us say that things which appear heterogeneous to us, are not necessarily so, and produce the formula:

(b)



The difference between (a) and (b), is the difference between an 'intensive' and an 'extensive' definition.[1] The 'extension' of a term is "the class of entities to which the term is applicable or refers", while the 'intension' is "the set of attributes which characterize any entity to which the term is correctly applied". The extension and intension vary in inverse proportion to each other. Thus the extension of fruit is greater than that of apple, since fruit includes apple, pear, banana, etc. in its extension. But the intension of apple is greater than that of fruit, since the description or

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[1] For this section, cf. Lyons, J. (1969) pp.454-5.

definition of apples demands the invocation of a wider range of attributes than are sufficient to define fruit.

Similarly, the extension of halei is greater than that of medicine or fetish or secret society, but the intension of medicine, etc. is greater than that of halei.

Putting this another way, the co-hyponyms[1] of halei are medicine, fetish, secret society and perhaps others; and halei is superordinate with respect ot its hyponyms; just as if we say "X is black", this implies "X is dark", but not vice-versa. Dark is superordinate with respect to black, brown, and other terms. Due to superordination and the unacceptability of equations like

* X is dark = X is black,

we can say: 'medicine' = halei

'fetishes' = halei

'secret societies' = halei, as in (b) above, but we may not say

* halei = 'medicine'

* halei = 'fetishes'

* halei = 'secret societies', as in (a) above.

The use of extension and intension indicates that there is no intrinsic problem in the concept of halei, and that its meaning can be elicited easily from native Mende people; it does not depend on English-speaking categories; and it does not lead the enquirer to the conclusion

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[1] Hyponymy is "unilateral implication".

either that the Mende is irrational or confused, or that the meaning or use of halei must be symbolically interpreted in order to make sense of it.[1]

What then, is halei, and how may we understand it? Apart from using words like 'supernatural' which I do not find helpful or necessary, Little[2] has a good enough descriptive definition of halei as the "power which Ngewɔ left behind and which derives from him", yet he fails to show that halei is a unitary concept and complementary in many ways to the 'power' exercised by the spiritual agents considered in our previous chapter. Both are sources of 'power' from one perspective, and from another provide lines of communication between Ngewɔ and nature, Creator and mankind, - and this can only be understood properly if we take Mende notions of halei seriously and relate them where necessary to notions of spirit. If we do this, then I believe it is possible to show how so-called Secret Societies fit into Mende social and religious life, and to indicate how the term halei is applied by the Mende not only to objects of various kinds, but also to social groups.

Halei is fundamentally linked to Mende religious collective representations and cannot in my view be understood in isolation from

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[1] If the class of hyponyms of halei be labelled B , and the superordinate halei be labelled X , then All B's are X , but we cannot say * All X's are B . The Mende know what belongs to the class B and they know what halei (X) is: to those who do not know this, questions are redundant or meaningless. If we substitute apple, pear, etc. for B , and fruit for X , we can show this, since questions fall into two kinds:

(i) is this apple a fruit?

(ii) is this fruit an apple?

[2] Little, K.L. (1967) p.227.

them. The context, institutionalization and embedding of halei in Mende social structure, are important to its comprehension, so that a recent article on "Structural aspect of a West African Society",[1] while eliciting interesting structural aspects, is curiously unevocative of Mende life and unenlightening about the rationale which informs it.

Halei may be glossed as 'metaphysical power' though having explained this gloss,[2] I will continue to use the vernacular term. The twin concepts of "beyond the physical", and "transcendent", are intrinsic to halei. Halei is equivalent to 'mana' in the sense adumbrated in a recent article,[3] namely that it is a personalized force. It is extrinsic to the objects in which it may sometimes be found, and not only is its origin in Ngewɔ, it is explicitly or implicitly recognized as a specific manifestation of his power,

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[1] Jẹ̀drej, (MSS). A fuller critique of Jẹ̀drej (1974), (1976a,b,) is beyond our present scope. But what I am concerned to do here, is to situate halei in an overall scheme which helps describe the way in which Mende people see themselves within the cosmos, related to other individuals and groups, sources of opportunity, dangers, and ultimately to Ngewɔ who arranged things the way they are.

[2] 'Spiritual power' would be acceptable if it meant 'incorporeal'; but there may be confusion between 'spiritual' and the spirits discussed in the previous chapter. 'Supernatural power' is a phrase I avoid since the distinction was previously made between Creator and creation and the power we talk of here is active and exercised in the world of nature not the world of 'supernature'. 'Metaphysical power' is as deficient as other terms abandoned, except that insofar as it is understood as 'beyond the physical' and 'transcendent', while operating within the world of nature, it will serve as a gloss.

[3] Philsooph, H. (1971).

different in kind from the trees or the rocks or cataracts which are also attributed to the creativity of Ngewɔ.

An indication of this is the fact that people are initiated or aggregated[1] to the world of halei during their lifetime, and that halei is thus not something totally independent of humanity, but carefully institutionalized. The "ceremonial death"[2] which initiates suffer on entry into the Pɔrɔ (Society), initiates them not only into the world of spirits and ancestors, but aggregates them formally to the world of halei: a participation in the power provided by Ngewɔ.[3]

Halei is a personal agent inasmuch as it can discriminate when activated against miscreants, and can identify and cause harm or redress against the guilty. It may be invoked by people who are considered wicked, or those who are good, both for social or anti-social, private or public ends. And it may harm or cure, depending on the intention breathed into it and producing the appropriate end.

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[1] The phrase ha halei ma refers to initiation and means literally "[to] die - halei - on". This idea of death (and rebirth), is part of the process of aggregation into the world of halei. At initiation, if a person wants to say what we might be inclined to translate as "he entered the Society", the Mende would say: "i ha halei ma/hũ" - The verb ha means equally "die", and "be initiated". Jɛ̣drej (1976a) p.252, says halei is "a transformation and condensation of those power which are attributed to ngafanga". I believe it is much more in keeping with Mende understanding, to see halei and ngafanga as related in the way proposed in this and in the previous chapter; and to see both halei and ngafanga associated, in the 'Secret Societies' (Ch.5).
Beattie, J. (1976) p.219, makes the point that "if the ascription of a mode of classification to a particular culture is to be acceptable, it must be demonstrably linked or at least be consistent, with the ways in which people do actually classify things in that culture". I feel that Jɛ̣drej fails to convince on that score.

[2] Hall, H.U. (1938) p.4.

[3] All Mende are ex officio members of the Humɔi (Society) from birth, and may be garlanded with various protective halei. But until formal adulthood they have no active participation in halei. At the level of social groups - societies - halei only operates on mature people, i.e. initiates.

Mende spells, "swears", certain "medicines", "fetishes" and "societies", explicitly or implicitly invoke the power of Ngewɔ, ancestors, or other spirits, thus linking one kind of agent, whether halei or spirit, to another, Ngewɔ. In the case of halei, an inanimate object, a decoction, even a locality, is 'impregnated' or 'invaded' with the power of Ngewɔ; Ngewɔ maintains his transcendence yet man is provided with some control over nature - particularly those aspects which are unknown or unseen.

Halei constitutes a part of the community ethos and attitudes towards it reflect values shared by the community. By creating patterns of behaviour and by helping to form mental attitudes, halei acts as a means of social control, sanctioning social and political aspirations, and legitimating many institutions. Even when destructively employed, halei serves to bring into relief the very structure under attack, and thereby emphasises that structure for society: invoked to explain sickness and death within a family it serves to remind people of their duties, and perhaps, of the fact of Ngewɔ's expectations of familial behaviour. Halei thus serves to emphasize the dynamic tension which exists between mankind in particular and nature in general: between the individual and the community, and between both and their Creator. To hope to discover anything worthwhile about Mende world-view,[1] or how the Mende people explain or come to terms with the world

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[1] The use of the concept 'world view' is problematical, and a formal presentation is left until later (Ch.6).

of and beyond sense and common sense, the articulation of halei must be systematically studied.

What justification is there for claiming not only that halei is a manifestation of conscious power, but that it derives from Ngewɔ and is for the use of mankind? When asked how certain practices concerned with halei arose, the Mende often replies: "Leve njeini", citing immemorial custom and the authority of the Creator.[1]

Having been given a very powerful "fetish" - gbanyɛi - by an official practitioner or "medicine-man" (halemɔi) who had scotched and neutralized it and asserted that it was now completely harmless, I told some rural Mende people that I had it. Apart from initial curiosity they wanted nothing to do with it - they would not even look at it. One explained that he would be afraid to see gbanyɛi in principle. It was a 'bad' halei, used for nefarious ends, but "the power was sent by Ngewɔ" and the raw materials were his creation. They represented as it were the elemental energy of Ngewɔ, dangerous and volatile still, and particularly to people not involved in its making.

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[1] For further example, cf. pp. 98ff, supra.

[2] People who recognize halei in objects, are afraid rather in the way an ingénue, told of the power of electricity, might be if standing under a high-tension electricity cable: even though he accepted on an intellectual level, that such power was controlled and could not electrocute a careful bystander, he would nevertheless be emotionally aroused by the simple awareness of awesome power which he knows as both potentially creative and potentially devastating.

This is a case of a very widely-feared object associated with halei. The gbanya halei can only be used for evil:[1] it is destructive and designed to kill an enemy. Reactions from the people would leave the observer in no doubt as to their belief in the power in the object. But as Mende say: "everything is worked by Ngewɔ", meaning that the effectiveness of non-purely-technical industry (e.g. herbal concoctions, manufacture of inanimate halei of a non-vegetable kind) derives from the power of Ngewɔ and not from native skill. The people do not make any clear and absolute gradations of halei[2] and are perfectly aware that halei, deriving from Ngewɔ, serves a whole range of purposes and is effective in various ways. Further, to think of halei as more or less powerful, more or less useful, outside of specific cases, is irrelevant; obviously, if a person seeks a cure for tilei,[3] he will not be satisfied with a purgative.

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[1] Another object, also called gbanyɛi is made for bringing luck to the one who has it. But a person cannot own it; it belongs to the one who originally made it, and the maker charges the lessee more and more money for its continued use. If the money is not paid, "the power returns to him [the owner]" as a group of people affirmed. This gbanyɛi is obtained from a halemɔi, not a Muslim practitioner or mɔri-man. Gbanyɛi looks like a pair of pliers bandaged or parcelled up. (Mende: gbanyɛi = pliers.)

[2] Except of course for the inquisitive outsider. If the enquirer leads the Mende by asking what is the most important halei, he is likely to receive an answer according to the informant's assessment of the enquirer's interpretation of "most important".

[3] tilei shows itself characteristically in a rotting of the nose. Its occurrence is associated with infractions of the moral code. halei is required. In fact tilei probably represents syphilis, though some tilei could be due to leprosy, I believe.

Mende clearly distinguish hale nyambubla, (in a non-specific sense this refers to anyone who uses halei to harm others: this is wicked, nyamui) from people who use herbal remedies, divination or sacrifice to beg the indulgence of Ngewɔ. Thus, protective "medicines", curative herbal preparations, many charms or sacrifices, are good and intended by Ngewɔ for man's use. As the people say: "All is to Ngewɔ".

Yet not every person has access to every type of halei directly: in some cases, as mentioned above, a person is aggregated to a group which has jurisdiction over it; in others the halei is institutionalized under the control of a particular individual. One type of witch-finder, kɛmamɔi, operates the antidote as it were, to the anti-social use of halei. "That is why we are pleased now, when the kɛmamɔi comes. He is saving life. Ngewɔ gives him his power. People let the witch-finder get rid of witches because they [the people] don't have this power." Interestingly, once my informants no longer felt they had to translate halei for me as "medicine" they frequently translated it as power,[1] when it was clear from the context that they were not simply talking of technical ability. Before one is conversant with the Mende language, many such distinctions cannot be grasped, and I have a note of one conversation in which the precise sense in which "power" is used, is unclear. A literate

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[1] kpayɛi = 'power' in the sense of the ability to act directly on something, to bring about a result.
halei = 'power' in the sense of acting mediately.
Talking of Ngewɔ, a Mende will say "kpayɛi gbi Ngi hu" - "all power is in him", whereas referring to their own behaviour they use kpayɛi or halei - the latter when talking about power in excess of purely human energies or technique.

Mende, talking about sanctions which Ngewɔ may invoke, said: "If a man does something very bad (murder), he knows Ngewɔ will punish him. Ngewɔ will 'lessen' his power, so that he will not do anything like that again." Though one cannot claim an association between "power" and halei in this instance, it is included since it shows how man's ability (technical and non-technical) is understood as related to Ngewɔ.

It may seem that too strong a contrast is being drawn here, between the world of halei and the everyday world of common-sense and experience, and that such a view is as ethnocentric as some of the analyses questioned in this chapter. First, it should be noted that in rural Mende country at least, halei is very important in daily life. Because halei is amoral but may be appropriated and employed for immoral as well as moral ends, it is the negative or frightening aspect which tends to be stressed: this bias will be redressed before the end of the chapter. But this section is not concerned with polarizing halei and the human community, or by implication halei and the world of spirits, except for the purposes of systematic analysis. Halei is integrated with the world of the living community, as we showed that spirits were. Integration does not mean perfect harmony, but some form of symbiosis. Halei is part of life, sometimes unremarkable, sometimes noticeable and sometimes canonized, but if not a constant preoccupation then certainly not an irrelevance.

The cosmos which the Mende shares, is also inhabited by animal and spiritual entities and contains vegetative life, natural physical objects, and natural elements - wind, water and fire. Ngewɔ, removed though not entirely separated from the world, is at least indirectly concerned with it. And as far as mankind is concerned, the arbitrament of Ngewɔ is exercised primarily through spirits and halei.[1]

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[1] This dispensation may perhaps be characterized as a kind of hylozoistic panentheism, which, if explained, may help us to appreciate the context in which halei exists and operates. Theism in its classical variety emphasises the transcendence of God; Pantheism, His immanence. Panentheism on the other hand, sees a world which is included somehow in God, though God is not defined in terms of the world alone: He is more than the world. Panentheism is also characterized by a God who is neither absolutely transcendent nor totally immanent, but who combines something of the two qualities - 'quaquaversal' would serve. Hylozoistic panentheism would be pluralistic - distinct from a monistic view subscribing to the unity of God and the world, and a dualistic view, maintaining the separateness of God's essence from the world - recognizing diversity and multiplicity of being and real events, and maintaining that God is one element in the world who 'animates' all the other elements. If we understand 'animates' as meaning 'maintains in existence', as well as 'endows with (Divine) power', we do not need to ascribe life to all matter, as crude hylozoism would. A panentheistic view of this kind would accommodate both the Mende belief in freedom and the somewhat constraining influence both of spirits and of halei which is said to 'catch' or 'take possession of' - hou - a man under its influence. Thus, a person who has halei to punish a malefactor, addresses it with such words as: "I do not know the man who has done me wrong, but you, powerful hale, you know him. Hurry up then, look out for him, search the depths of darkness, and activate your works of vengeance promptly . . . " - collected by and included in C.S.Sp. (F) (1930).

Man of himself, is not fully in control of his world; as an ancestral spirit he is thought to have greater power.[1] Yet man has access to halei. I believe we should see halei quite simply as a particular manifestation of the power - kpayɛi - of Ngewɔ which exists on earth for man to share in, either individually or in groups. It transcends man's capacities yet exists to be harnessed and at least in some sense controlled by him. But halei is not man's normal element, as farming or carving would be: it can destroy him, and is dangerous because highly volatile. A person called to swear on a renowned and powerful Chiefdom halei, may be very frightened, not because he wants to lie, but because he fears he might forget something, and the halei would perform its duty of dire sanction.

We saw the different types of spiritual agencies and how they related to individuals and groups;[2] we can now examine halei in the same way, (fig. 12).

The Mende knows that in the world which he inhabits, are the raw materials to satisfy many of his needs. To these raw materials he brings his skills, turning trees, palm-branches and earth, into dwellings, or the cotton-pod into clothes. Resources too, can yield important supplies - rice, salt, palm oil. But there are other things man needs or wants, to deal with snake bites, hepatitis, or other sicknesses or dangers. This or that leaf, plant, or root, may provide food for man or animals, or fulfil practical uses. In a sense, all these things yield according to their kind,

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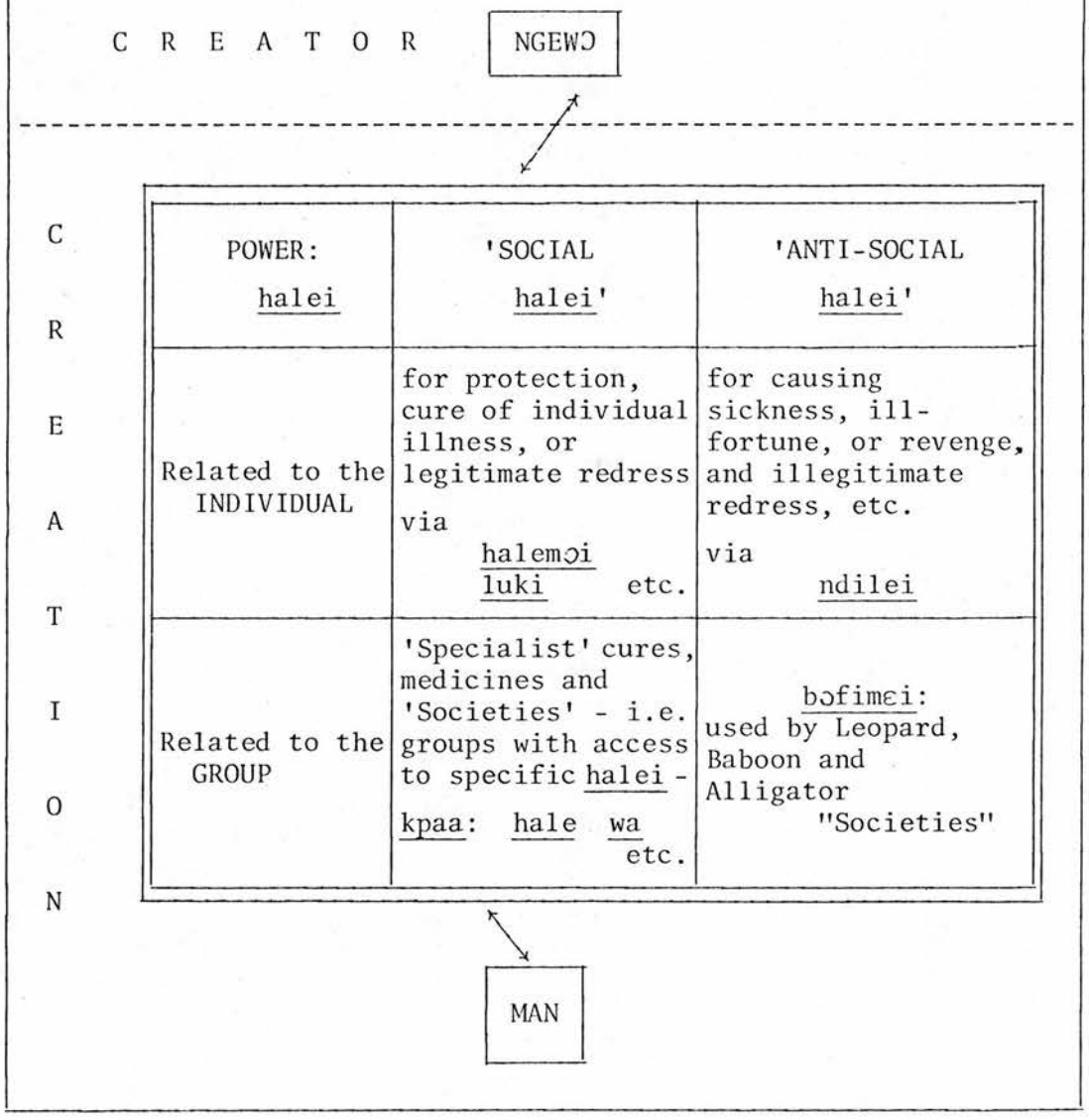
[1] In a prayer calling on the ancestors, Ngewɔ is addressed: "Bi kpaya ve ti wɛ" - "Give your [Ngewɔ] power (kpaya) to them [the ancestors]. Ngewɔ is not invoked for halei in this context: the ancestors are invested with the power to act directly.

[2] Fig.8, p.100, Ch.3.

"POWER" FIG. 12



or to the technical skills of man. But someone who creates a special decoction or nostrum, whose constituents are claimed to have been 'revealed' in a dream, is asserting much more than technical competence or folk knowledge, and the efficacy of the remedy - whether in pharmacological terms or in terms of wider therapeutic application - is

not ascribed simply to the inherent dynamic of the vegetable or mineral substances but to the power of Ngewɔ, which makes such substances halei.

Where such substances, their manufacture or control, are in the hands of an individual properly accredited with competence to operate in this fashion, he is called a halemɔi (lit. hale - person). When, on the other hand, halei of some kind is in the custody of a continuing or self-perpetuating group of whatever kind, the group:halei relationship thus institutionalized, is known by a specific name such as Njaye halei, Kpaa halei, Ndivi halei, Humɔ halei, and so on. Such groups and other, more well-known ones, are incorrectly called Secret Societies.[1]

If, for "supernatural", in the following quotation, we substitute "metaphysical power" in the sense explained above (p.180 supra), then halei falls unquestionably within the realm of religion rather than magic —

> "Religion . . . involves, among other things, belief in supernatural beings, whose actions relative to man, may be influenced and even controlled. Magic, on the other hand, presupposes a rigid relation of cause and effect, unaffected by supernatural agents." [2]

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[1] To translate "The Njayei Society has 'medicine'", is impossible if one expects two words for 'society' and 'medicine', or even the same word reoccurring. The translation would render something like this: "The Njayei (people) have 'halei': halei lɔ Njaye(bla) hũ." Likewise "This society has strong medicine" would be rendered - "this halei is strong/difficult: halei ji kpakpaungɔ". Clearly, the Mende concept is unitary and cannot signify what to us are disparate concepts, "society", and "medicine".

[2] Beals, A. and Hoijer, H. (1959) p.553.

I hope it is now clear that halei goes far beyond "the rigid relations of cause and effect", which Mende recognize, and that it is not unaffected by supernatural agents, if this rather infelicitous use of 'supernatural' be seen as a reference to Ngewɔ, or if diviners (tɔtɔgbɛmɔi) or hale-men be seen as agents of Ngewɔ.

We come then to the heart of Mende religious thought and practice, in which veneration of ancestors, relations with various other spirits, halei, socio-religious groups, diviners, prophets and dreams, form the integrated components of a complex machinery which serves to provide mankind with some access to the creator and some control over the vicissitudes of life, as well as a rationale for the common norms of behaviour. And if we should not expect anyone to be conscious of formal relations between parts of his religious, ethical or legal system, nor should we decry attempts to elicit and analyse these means of access and control, and to derive a model from the analysis, provided it is both compatible with people's behaviour and consistent with the ways Mende people classify and explain things in their own culture.[1]

4-2 HALEI ("SOCIAL")

4-2.1 Social halei and the individual[2]

As noted in Chapter Three, people belong to a variety of groups and the demands of the group are in many ways prior to those

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[1] Beattie, J. (1976) p.219.

[2] cf. Little, K.L. (1967) pp.227f.

of individuals. Yet there remains scope for individual activity which is socially recognized or approved, provided it does not militate against social groups. Individuals avail of halei through institutionalized channels as members of social groups. Amoral, or 'neutral' as Little prefers, its potential danger needs to be controlled and legitimated, as we shall see in a consideration of halei and groups. But halei may be legitimately used by individuals, either in extreme cases, to gain legitimate redress against agressors, or in cases of individual needs which cannot be supplied by the group.

An individual may own or use halei in the form of drugs, charms or other objects whose purpose is to protect, assist, redress wrongs, witness, and otherwise to bring about an end which exceeds his native skills. He may use to halei (lit. "standing halei"), objects fixed, hung or erected on the recommendation of the halemɔi, so as to safeguard individual rights. A pot (fɛ) half buried near a house, farm or crops, will safeguard the individual's property by preventing any potential malefactor from encroaching. A fist-sized stone hung up by rope or vine, will prevent lightning striking, as will the application to the body, of a mixture of the ashes from old burned clothing, and palm oil. Ngila bawɛi is halei, oval in shape and as big as a large egg. It is made of leaves and other vegetable matter, rolled into a ball and wrapped in cotton cloth (fande gulɛi). This is obtained from halemɔi yet some Mende believe that a hunter may find one in the stomach of his quarry, and it will both bring him luck, and harm anyone who tries to steal it. Ngila bawɛi is

believed to bring good fortune either in hunting or in gambling.[1] A barren woman may go to a halemɔi, though since she is typical of people whose need is not purely individual but represents the interests of a larger number within the community, she like others, may well end up by going as a member of a group to seek halei at the group level.

The cases cited above are examples of recommendations of the halemɔi. Though everyone who has some involvement with halei could loosely be termed a "halei-person", (halemɔi), nevertheless there is a specific social and ritual position for a halemɔi who operates for the community at large, generally in terms of its individual members. One very well-known halemɔi whom I met, showed me round his emporium which was somewhat like a pawn shop inasmuch as on the floor and on makeshift shelves were various objects of seeming bric-à-brac, including feathers, rusting pots, jars, sticks, pebbles, rags of cloth and so on. He had ten or a dozen young girls as apprentices, who went to 'bush' every day to collect specific herbs and vegetable matter. The halemɔi mixed them, the girls prepared them by pounding or rubbing them together, and they were then made up in package or bottle. The halemɔi had a steady clientèle from far afield, attracted no doubt by his success, signs of which were the various halei that he had "pulled" or neutralized, and deposited round his house as trophies. He maintained that he had

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[1] Innes, G. (1969) gives ngili: "the employment of 'medicine' in order to win favour; use 'medicine' against" - This word may well be the root of ngilabawɛi. bawɛi as a form of mbawo = save, recover, heal, may be involved here, though I have no statement on this matter, from informants.

become a halemɔi as a result of a dream in which Ngewɔ told him to go to the forest and pick certain leaves. From then on he had used his own experience, intuition and reliance on Ngewɔ to confect remedies, and success bred success. The girls did not "know halei"; they merely acted as assistants.[1] The halemɔi, though a proud and ambitious man, nevertheless professed that the halei was from Ngewɔ in the first instance and not due to his technical skills or knowledge of folk medicine. He relates to people as individuals, not as groups, providing both remedies for sickness and protective halei.

The knowledge possessed by the halemɔi is then, both telestic and practical, experiential knowledge. He is an integral part of Mende life, and different from the mɔrimɔi, a Muslim practitioner who is not concerned with halei since halei is indigenous and non-Muslim. In practice however, there is some overlapping between halebla (sing. halemɔi) and mɔribla (sing. mɔrimɔi) and many Mende do not now distinguish clearly between the provisions of both, except that mɔri-men are more usually accredited with "bad-fetishes" - i.e. harmful, anti-social business.[2]

If the halemɔi has an institutionalized position in Mende country, legitimately controlling halei, it nevertheless remains true that some people still try to 'make' their own halei privately. Presumably if they seem successful, they may claim authority and go into 'business'; if not successful they can use a recognized halemɔi. But it is said that people used to prepare their own 'halei' by

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[1] A process known as "learning the leaves".

[2] A literate Mende will probably make a distinction between "jujuman" and "mɔriman", the former being the indigenous practitioner, the latter a parvenu of non-indigenous beliefs.

taking a stone and sewing it into their clothes, or mixing leaves and tying them in a cloth bundle. As they did so, they had to call on the name of Ngewɔ to make the preparation into halei since otherwise it could never transcend its ordinary capacities. There is an account - which I cannot precisely verify - to the effect that to 'consecrate' any object halei, that is, to make "preternatural powers" come and inform it by way of benediction or malediction, it is required that one expose the object for four days in the locality occupied by the particular spirit or spiritual power that one wishes to attract, after uttering a prayer for the occasion and formulating the intentions for which one wishes to possess the halei.[1] Nowadays however private halei of this kind is very much discouraged: other people may suspect that the individual's intentions were not honourable. On arrival in a village, the witchfinder (kemamɔi) invited by the Chief, declares an armistice on all halei surrendered before he starts his search. If after that, he finds any which does not look conventional, the owner risks accusation of witchcraft. Consequently individuals are circumspect in the private acquisition of halei.

Other purveyors of halei are certain groups: I do not deal with them here except to say that they also provide halei of a specialist and individual nature. Thus the Njayei people are those who belong to a certain family, (typically, one of whose members claimed halei given to him in a dream) or those who are initiated under special conditions of manifestation of mental illness. Others however, may

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[1] N.D. C.S.Sp. (F) (1930).

obtain halei which has nothing to do with mental illness, is given on an individual basis and is called "luki", i.e. halei for various kinds of good fortune (luck). This halei is always herbal, made from things found in the bush and as the people say, "given by Ngewɔ". It may be to bring good fortune to a hunter, and to protect against "bad halei" or "fetish" which someone uses to harm or kill another. A cord of creeper or vine may be supplied to protect the wearer from enemies who might cause a snake to approach unseen. The "luki halei" may also be designed to bring success to someone contesting a vacant chiefdom office or pursuing other legitimate ambition, but Njayei people do not use halei for evil ends. Even when providing "luki", all the members of the family owning the halei, will be summoned,[1] and the cost of the halei is therefore quite high (£1.50 and a small bottle of rum, 1975), even for fairly routine and non-specific luck.

As for the Njayei people, so for the members of the Humɔi house in a locality: they are primarily concerned with maintaining the right relationship between bush and citizens, and thus work to maintain social, communal values; but if an individual finds his area of bush is unaccountably unproductive, the Humɔi people will make halei to purify the bush and restore correct relations - industry leading to fertility - between farmer and farmed land.

Enough has been said to show that the individual qua individual, has access to halei either on his own initiative, through

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[1] Membership seems quite strongly patrilineal, and a woman may be the head of the Njayei people: how exclusively patrilineal membership is, I cannot say due to lack of comparative data.

the halemɔi, or through appeal to families or groups with custody or ownership of particular halei. If this seems to provide relatively few options, it is simply because another range of opportunities is available to people as members of groups.

4-2.2 Social halei and the group

Much ethnographic writing on Mende culture mentions "major" or "important" Societies, (listing perhaps Pɔrɔ, Bundu (Sande), Njayei, Humɔi and Wunde), with reference to other smaller "Societies", but with little or no systematic explanation as to what constitutes a major Society, and how if at all, minor Societies are related. Likewise we have no thoroughgoing statement as to why so many "Societies" exist and what differentiating characteristics there may be.

In this section we can do little more than draw up a tentative list of groups which are characterized by their possession of halei, state the variety of halei involved, show how its use is legitimated, and leave a fuller presentation for elsewhere: this is a very wide and interesting area but the ethnographic detail is too much to present in its entirety, and what I have does not of course exhaust the subject by any means.

A person with a particular problem or unfulfilled aspiration can be expected, first, to use this intelligence and experience; but some things exceed normal human skills. A hunter may suffer a period of failure while lesser men succeed; a man may accidentally inflict a wound on himself while working on his farm, and the wound fails to heal despite ordinary remedies. There are

many dangers and many sources of opportunity in life. Not all preoccupy everyone all the time of course, but a hunter who fails to catch anything is in jeopardy and will look for whatever advice or remedy he can.

Many smallish groups of people specialize in various forms of healing, social control, or provision of remedies, all of which specialities are claimed to be derived not from technical knowledge, nor from beneficent ancestors, but from a revelation and transmission of halei, acknowledged to be from Ngewɔ. Characteristically, control of the halei and leadership of the group, resides in a particular family and is claimed to have been "shown" in a dream, though several families scattered over the country, may claim similar halei. The various Njayei lodges for example, claim to have the very same halei through the different families to whom Ngewɔ gave the secret at different times.

There is a distinction between membership of such a group, and affiliation to it. Strictly, the only full members of Njayei are those patrilineally related to the person who originally dreamed of the halei, and perhaps those who are aggregated according to the good graces of the family (some affines for example: informants differed on this point). The Njayei is in session for much of the year, when the family members will foregather to cure "crazy people", as well as give luki to others. But such clients do not become members. Here is the testimony of a Njayei-family member:

> "There are many people to continue [with Njayei meetings]. The present leader is a woman. Her husband therefore, does not know the halei. Her brother knows about it. This brother and sister are from the same father. A person dreams this

> halei and then goes and gets it - always under the water. When you have the dream you will become crazy and begin to sing Njayei songs. Njayei means "in the water". The [the family] will make ceremonies. You go and dive in the water and will remain one or two days. And people will be singing until you come out. The possessor then has the power to cure - not to make other people crazy."

This is a good illustration of the procurement of halei and its use. Njayei members mobilize as a group and perform the curing ceremony for individuals, but I consider this as different from the purely private, individualized practice of the halemɔi which we saw in the previous section, since this latter example suggests the primarily social- or group-orientation of the Njayei. When providing luki it is working for individual ambition; when healing crazy people, it is surely working to restore a person to society, in a case of necessity. The rituals are communal and the "crazy person" helped by the Njaye halei is reintegrated and accepted into society. Njayei is well enough documented, however. There are other examples of the way in which halei is used to create and serve social groups rather than purely individual interest.

Kpaa

It is always difficult to trace accurately, historical antecedents of institutions obtaining in Mende country today, and it is possible that explanations other than the one given here, may be offered by different informants: Mende certainly differ among themselves in knowledge, interest and imaginativeness, many content simply to explain immemorial custom by the words "Leve njeini". (cf. Chapter Three, pp.98-99.)

kpaa, a word with the same tone pattern as the Kpaa under discussion here, means a spear, machete or long knife. Kpale means

a pain wound, ache, etc. or "to be painful, to ache". Both words are quoted as the base form of our word Kpaa.

Kpaa is relevant when anyone in the course of work, inflicts a wound on himself with a machete or knife, and the wound is slow to heal. With or without consultation of the Diviner (tɔtɔgbɛmɔi), if one goes to the Kpaabla (Kpaa-people) and fulfils certain requirements, the wound will heal - some say by means of a medicinal remedy; some say no medicine is involved; there is agreement that halei is involved.

Kpaa procedure involves members of a family and other invited members, as well as a ceremony performed on three stones at the praying place of Kpaa gamɛi.[1] These three stones disposed in a straight line, are the Kpaa gɔtui (lit. "Kpaa-stone"), on which the initiand sits; the kɔndɔ gɔtui (the food/meal stone), on which an animal is sacrificed,[2] and the maha gbalɛi (the stone which is "chief of wounds") on which the Kpaa[3] leader sits. Not only those with self-inflicted wounds may come or be sent to the Kpaabla; so do those who stub and break a toe, become caught on a thorn, get something in their eye, or otherwise suffer an injury which, while not fatal, is a nuisance.

It is customary also, for a hunter to deposit the head of an animal killed in the hunt, on the kɔndɔ gɔtui. If he is too greedy and fails to do so, he will wound himself very soon, and the sore will not heal. If a person thus hurts himself, people will say "Kpaa hindɛi mia" - it is "Kpaa business". Likewise people who plot,

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[1] ka/ga = to teach, learn, perform. gamɛi > performance.

[2] Preferably a wild animal caught in the hunt: otherwise a fowl will serve.

[3] I do not know precisely how, but Kpaa is an arm of Humɔi, though Kpaa is not now as widespread as formerly, and Humɔi seems to take over its functions where necessary.

speak destructively or gossip unduly; and if a man fails to heed verbal advice, a self inflicted, unhealing wound will result. Hence the phrase "Numu layia lɔ, Kpaa hinda le" - "It is a person's speech that causes Kpaa (wounds)". When a wounded person comes to obtain halei, men and boys who are Kpaabla, should foregather.[1] The head of the animal - bush pig, deer, or surrogate, is placed on the kɔndɔ gɔtui, the person in charge of the ceremony sits on the maha gɔtui and the suppliant on the Kpaa gɔtui. Everyone shuts his eyes while the leader says four times "Kpaa bɛi sina vɔndɔa" which seems to be a reference to "Sina", the founder(?) of Kpaa, and means "the rice of the Kpaa caused Sina to sweat".[2] This is all I could discover about this phrase, but before it is said, rice is put on the kɔndɔ gɔtui, people eat the remainder, then turn the rice pots upside down on the ground. After the chant, all open their eyes and say

"O Mangewɔ, nya yama i wo[3] hinda wanda ma" -

"O Ngewɔ, my eye opens upon wonderful things" -

meaning that they will be able to catch many fine animals in the hunt.

Kpaa halei is not necessarily a specific "medicine"; nor need it be a "Society" in the sense that it gathers or takes part in communal activity apart from dealing with people with recalcitrant sores, aches or types of illness. Nevertheless, it is halei and

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[1] If the Diviner says a woman must go to Kpaa gɔtui, then men and women go but women only stay for the food, and do not take part in the prayer. Only the men pray, even if a woman is on the stone, I was told.

[2] Innes, G. (1969), "kpaabla wu sindafɔndɔ - a formula often shouted by the first worker to finish his stint on a farm." Though this is surprisingly like the phrase quoted above, I know of no connection.

[3] wo > (nda)wo = to open.

legitimated by appeal to a dream. People I met could not agree about the origin, though there is an account, unverified but collected from informants.[1] It is recalled here as an example of halei in the shape of specialist groups, remedies, and as an example of religious behaviour.

> "The origin . . . has its roots in a dream and here is the story as transmitted from father to son. There was once a young woman. Her husband was bent double with age. Not knowing what to do to help him straighten up she addressed herself directly to Mangewɔ. [Ngewɔ] had pity on her and came to speak with her: the following night she had a dream. She dreamed that, in order to cure her husband and reinvigorate his old bones, she should sit him on a stone, immolate a white hen on a second stone, and sit herself on a third. The woman did what Ngewɔ had shown her in her dream: she gathered three stones and made her husband sit on the largest. The husband was cured immediately as if by magic (enchantement), lost his hump and resumed his former upright stature. A short time after the miraculous cure of her husband, the happy woman gave birth to a son, and to her son (when he was grown up) she made this testament: "let me make you sit on this stone, the very one which cured your father. From now on it belongs to you, and whomsoever you allow to sit upon it, will be certainly cured. And thus was the knowledge about this mysterious stone transmitted."

Kpaa halei is not simply identified with an object or Hale wa "medicine"; rather the halei is obtained by means of a communal ritual. Hale wa on the other hand, identifies both participants or recipients of a certain kind of halei, and a physical object called hale wa ("big halei") itself.

Only men can be initiates of hale wa, claimed by some as the most powerful halei, and likewise the most volatile. The

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[1] N.D. C.S.Sp. (F) (1930).

Paramount Chief alone initiates new members, and the members nowadays are few and far between. The people explain this fact by saying the halei is too powerful and demanding of those who have it.

All that remains visible in most villages is a small mound of rocks, overgrown and almost unnoticeable - certainly unremarkable. Initiates have a small leather pouch worn at the waist under the clothes. They will put their right hand in among the pile of rocks and then touch or rub the pouch, also with the right hand. Non-members know little of the hale wa, and members do not broadcast information. People know enough however, not to sit on the pile of stones, nor to touch it, nor to allow animals to foul it, and one man was extremely agitated when I made to touch the pile of stones. Many people are afraid to join because there are many regulations: an initiate may not climb any palm tree - nor indeed any tree - otherwise it will die. If one touches the pouch with the left hand one will go mad, and the same sanction will fall on anyone who infringes the more secret regulations. No one should approach new initiates who, to show their displeasure will imitate, mimic and repeat words addressed to them by non-initiates.

It seems that the importance of hale wa lies in its power as an antidote to any hale nyamui or "bad halei" used for anti social purposes. One who possesses hale wa will be able to "eat" - destroy - all other evil halei and has the right of search and entry into suspects' houses. In consequence, initiates of hale wa are feared.

A teacher assured me that in his youth (1940's) there were many more people involved with hale wa, and cited a case concerning an initiate who was bitten by a snake and "almost at point of death". The leader of hale wa came and "anointed" him and he recovered.

People who join, do so freely, "to get fame and not to be struck down by hale nyamui". The origin of hale wa is unknown to me. An unverifiable piece of information was that former leaders of the women's Bundu (Sande) are buried near the hale wa stones.

Here again then, we have a formally constituted, institutionalized way for people to obtain halei as members of a group. The halei in this case is for "fame" and protection against anti-social halei, and serves to attract people to form social groups with a socially recognized function and competence.

There are many more such kinds of halei but for brevity, while documenting my point about the types and uses of halei, only a brief gloss will be provided here.

Mɛndɛi (Mɛdɛi)

Those men who are impotent (ti gbuha) have a social as well as a private embarrassment, and in Mende country there are (a few) families who have halei for this complaint. I was told that a man would go to such a family, where "the women would serve him", which from the context suggested much more than providing a special concoction. The halei involved here, is called mɔyɔ halei.[1] Only people aggregated into the family which holds the halei have access to it, and mɛndɛi, said one informant, is not a Society but a halei. Another said the halei was made by obtaining certain roots, washing, beating and grinding them, and serving it as a drink, gboye. Undoubtedly mɛnda halei is not privately appropriated but is for the benefit of the group of which the patient is a member.

[1] The constituents are described as black peppers and clay. Innes (1969) however, gives "a ball of medicine which is rubbed on the affected part. Sulɛ mɔyɔ - a ball of medicine concocted of ginger and the bark of certain trees", suggesting that one is halei and the other is simple medicine. My own information on mɔyɔ was that it consisted of beaten leaves mixed with dirt (clay), rubbed on a stone, and rubbed on a person.

Lamboi, yamboi

The knowledge of this halei is also inherited and people who have access to it do not pay for it. A man may catch a snake which he rubs or squeezes and from which he extracts "water" (venom?). Anyone who has this "water" wrapped in a pouch and worn on their person, will frighten off any snake in the vicinity.

Kpekɛle[2]

Like Kpaa, this seems to be associated with Humɔi. There is a female Humɔi officer with this name and the word may derive from kpekɛ-ndii ("sharp knife - heart"). The Kpekɛle gamɛi is a place of prayer and sacrifice, consisting of three stones in triangular formation at which an individual's tongue is scraped with a sharp knife or razor as part of a ceremony of healing. Information was hard to come by, but one gathers the kpekɛle serves to cure sickness for the benefit of the group rather than simply on an individual basis. Confirmation about the association of kpekɛle and infractions of sexual mores was not obtained, though hinted at.

Kondo[3]

The halei provided here is to protect society from the powers of witchcraft. Those who possess halei in this context, can "see" witches and free others from their power (how, is not explained). Kondo halei is presented in a preparation of leaves, burned and put in a large snail shell (see "ashes", below[4] - nduvui) which is hung over one's doorway as a

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[1] There is a "society" of "snake charmers" of the same name, but here I am interested only in establishing facts relating to halei. cf. Hall, H.U. (1938) p.7. cf. [Jędrej. (1976a) p.253].

[2] cf. Little, K.L. (1967) p.249.

[3] cf. Little, K.L. (1967) p.231.

[4] "nduvui" - "ashes" we saw in the previous chapter. They are reputedly used to make strong halei in various contexts, cf. Harris, W. and Sawyerr, H. (1968) pp.83-4.

protection for house and occupants. In a ceremony at which a person joins, liquid is put into his eyes (to enable him to "see" witches) and a crude effigy of a witch is given him. Anyone may join, but if a householder is a member, the halei will protect his dependents.

Fangɛ

This particular halei is reputedly much more powerful even than kondo halei, and is prepared in the form of a charm tied under the breast-bone. Again, it provides protection from witches.

Ndivi

I know very little about this halei except that both men and women may benefit from it. It is held by a small group - whether or not a family I cannot say for sure - and is used for curing certain unspecified sicknesses. A sick person who qualifies for ndivi halei is taken to the members. The ndivi is taken from the box in which it is kept and a ceremony called ndivi mali - "to grease or anoint the ndivi", is performed with the sick person. It seems again, that the sickness has to have significant social implications.

These are some of the wide range of halei, usually held by a family, legitimated by a dream, provided for groups of people (hunters, farmers) or individuals as members of groups. There are many others,[1] some very localized, some already mentioned in the literature. I have confirmation of hɛmɔ halei and himɔ halei, mbɛkɛ gɔtɔ and other sources of halei but the point at issue should by now have been established: that there is halei which to the

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[1] cf. Hall, H.U. (1938) pp.7-8, for Sherbro groups of this kind.

outsider may be associated with "fetishes", "medicines" and "groups", but that these categories are irrelevant to the nature of halei itself, and that indeed halei may be transmitted not through anointings or objects, but simply through performance of ritual. And we have distinguished also, between the halemɔi as one involved in halei for individual protection, aggrandizement or cure, and the halei designated for certain groups of people or individuals' restoration to groups or protection in groups, and most frequently obtained from identifiable groups.

Finally, halei can be used, not only as an individual "swear" or curse in specified circumstances, but is available for all and sundry to declare upon - rather like the Bible in a Courtroom.[1] Sondu wa halei - 'big swear/curse halei' - is in the possession of the Chiefdom and used also in civil Courts. It is highly feared and its presence in the shape of objects covered in red cloth and cowrie shells, animal horns, pouches and so on, together with its reputation, is often enough to terrify a witness and extract confessions on the spot. There is a variety of forms which an oath may take, and following it a concoction may be drunk. The British discovered the awe in which sondu wa halei was held, and instituted a formal swearing on halei in the Courts of the Protectorate:

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[1] cf. Little, K.L. (1948) pp.127-130, especially p.129 on 'municipalization'. It will be noted that my presentation differs from that of Little, as do some points of interpretation. I have tried to state my position clearly, with full knowledge of his. This is not a polemic but I am trying to establish halei in a more analytic framework and relate it to other aspects of Mende life and belief, and it does not seem useful to pursue a full critique of other work.

> "I swear by this medicine that I will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Should I tell a lie, if I go to my farm a snake bite me [sic]; if I go in a canoe on the river, may the canoe sink; as I drink this medicine may my belly swell. I swear by my liver, my lungs, my kidneys and my heart. If I should tell a lie may I always be in danger and die suddenly (drinks medicine here)." [1]

In this context one swears on halei which is an agent of social control. There are other swears, the strongest of which is kotoi, but these have nothing to do with halei. Hence halei cannot be said to be a "swear", but there exists halei on which one swears.

We must now turn to the anti-social uses to which halei may be put, and will look at bad-halei and the individual, before looking at how anti-social halei can be mobilized by groups of people.

4-3 HALEI ("ANTI-SOCIAL")

4-3.1 Anti-social halei and the individual

The most detailed and helpful ethnographic account of anti-social halei, is that provided by Harris,[2] but in what follows I shall look at his subject from a different theoretical perspective. Having discussed spiritual agencies in the previous chapter, I consider in the present chapter only the subject of halei or "power" not associated with spirits. In the next chapter we will see how both

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[1] Wilberforce, D.F. - Records relating to Trials on Cannibalism 1906-1913, Sierra Leone: quoted in Kalous, M. (1974) p.141.

[2] Harris, W.T. and Sawyerr, H. (1968) Ch.4.

power and spiritual agencies operate together, in a social and in an anti social context. Hence we deal here only with sorcery and "bad-halei" as distinct from witchcraft,[1] since there is an analytic distinction to be made based on empirical evidence. But the distinction between sorcery and witchcraft is not one which is employed consistently by the Mende themselves: indeed to systematize the data here, we are obliged to be interpretative. The Mende seem equally frightened by and opposed to the anti-social use of halei, whether with or without the association of spiritual agencies, but we can disclose an underlying structure to their belief and behaviour by following up our distinction between spirits and power as sources of opportunity, challenge, sanction and communication with Ngewɔ, which will show the articulation of a system which has previously not been noticed or made explicit.

Hale nyamui (lit. "bad halei") refers then, to halei procured or used in an anti-social way, and Harris[2] makes the very telling point that "the hale nyamubla (sing. hale nyamumɔ) do not assume the influence of a spirit", - a point which is unfortunately left at the level of an unexplained statement, but is nevertheless extremely important and serves to distinguish hale nyamubla in general, from witches in particular.

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[1] I distinguish here sorcery (using antifacts to procure anti social ends) and witchcraft (acting without recourse to objects, but directly), as well as including the Zande distinction of sorcery/magic and witchcraft/spiritual power, except that since my understanding of halei is as a personalized form of 'mana', related to Ngewɔ, "magic" is inadequate. Sorcery is the perversion, not of magical power for the Mende, but of the power directly acknowledged as of Ngewɔ - therefore religious.

[2] op.cit. p.84.

Perhaps the most frequently-heard word in the context of hale nyamui is the word ndilei, described by Little as "witch-cum-boa constrictor",[1] though Harris[2] notes that it is associated with a vampire bat. Yet the Mende are not at all afraid of the snake called ndilei, (actually a python), though they are afraid of ndilei which they believe to be halei nyamui. They further believe that ndilei (hale nyamui), can turn into various objects, including snakes, to confuse other people. Ndilei as halei nyamui may be localized in a bundle of rags, a bottle, or an old pot, an oval ball of string, perhaps with some cowrie shells or tingɔi, (a mineral substance, reddish in colour) tied or sewn on. But one who discovered such objects would not - unless he were kɛmamɔi - suspect they were ndilei, since ndilei itself, is invisible and intangible. Even if one did suspect, he would hardly dare to make an accusation, for fear the halei-nyamui would strike him. Consequently we have to distinguish: python - visible - harmless - (Mende, ndilei)

and ndilei - invisible - harmful - (Mende, ndilei), as

two quite different things. As one informant explained

> "You may suspect a person of having ndilei ("snake-familiar"), and therefore of being wicked, but you can't see the ndilei, so you can't prove the matter."

The only person who can - kɛmamɔi - is the official responsible for rooting out people who practise hale nyamui of the kind associated with ndilei.

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[1] Little, K.L. (1967) p.231.

[2] op.cit. (1968) p.78.

[3] The only snake I ever saw anyone playing with was "ndilei" and it was a python. People questioned made no association between this snake and hale nyamui. The young man who had a python was in no way feared or suspected of any bad behaviour.
cf. Innes, G. (1969) ndilei = python.

A case will illustrate the problem. One day an old woman claimed she saw a man talking to a snake which he had in a chicken coop. She reported the matter to the Chief, and the Chief and some of his advisors apprehended the man and the chicken coop. A "trial" ensured, with the young man denying all knowledge of hale nyamui, and the coop remaining unopened on the ground. The trial was a catharsis - people being brought to see how wickedness could be under their very noses, and everyone being suitable indignant and shocked. The "defendant" attracted hostility from all sides - men and women saying that now they understood why so much misfortune had recently befallen the town (arguably no more than usual). Finally the chicken coop was opened and found to be empty except for a harmless-looking piece of rock. Everyone had expected to see a snake, and in the four or five hours of the "trial" people had gathered from all around, excitedly talking about it. Yet the sight of the stone produced only a momentary confusion. A respected elder stood and immediately said that of course one could expect to see only a stone: the accused, having been discovered, had simply changed the ndilei from snake to stone, to try and confuse people who did not know better. The accused was found guilty and heavily fined.

Though the word ndilei can refer either to a python or to hale nyamui, people do not confuse the two, though the observer might. Two other points are worthy of note in this respect. People speak of the "ndilei-bird", a bird, perhaps a large bat,[1]

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[1] "The 'ndili' (sic) was in one of the mango trees near the house last night . . . Ndili heard again tonight. The boys tried to drive it away." 25-26/5/1950, N.D. C.S.Sp. Moyamba Journal.

which shrieks at night and frightens people who fear for their children's safety. Ndilei then, can refer to a particular kind of hale nyamui which can manifest itself in many ways, including the "ball of string", the snake, and an unseen bird or bat.

Though ndilei is also used for "python", a homonym which people would disambiguate according to context is nde le(we). Orthographically ndilei and nde le look very different; in connected speech they are the same, and the latter means "to cut (off) the brother (or kin): (nde = birth, brother, cousin, sister; le > tewe > le(we) = to cut). Thus nde le is understood to mean "to cause rupture within the family", which is exactly what hale nyamui would do. This is by no means as fanciful as it sounds.

The person who has hale nyamui in the form of ndilei, is known as a ndilemɔi, and is believed to use this halei for the selfish pursuit of success, particularly sexual. The object ndilei can transform itself into an extremely attractive member of the opposite sex, but unless ndilei is "nurtured" or "fed", its power will atrophy. Consequently the ndilei needs to be provided with human blood and fat, typically from new born children and infants. The owner can send out the ndilei under one of its many guises, to "eat" babies.[1] Infant deaths are largely attributed to the activity of the ndilemɔi and there are periodic ndilei-cleansing rituals performed by the kɛmamɔi to make a town safe for mothers and children. The kɛmamɔi[2] thus performs an important service for the

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[1] cf. Little K.L. (1967) p.231.

[2] "17.8.1934. Great commotion in the town of ——. Chief —— hired a medicine man to hunt out the famous "boa" or "ndile" medicine. Up to now, three bundles were found, each appertaining to a different owner. The names of X - (a stranger), Y, and Z, were mentioned. N.D. C.S.Sp. Serabu Journal II.

community with halei obtained from a dream-experience, whereas the ndilemɔi is believed to attack the community by harming or killing individuals by means of the hale nyamui bought from a previous owner or from a practitioner of hale nyamui. Most people questioned maintained that they did not know who would provide ndilei: a few (Christians) said, from the Muslim mɔri-man; Muslims said this was not so and that ndilei must come from a "medicine man", halemɔi. I am not at all clear about the original provenance of ndilei, but suspect that kɛmamɔi manufactures the "ball of string" artefact, which I have seen him 'discover' and blame on a previously accused person.[1]

Hale nyamui in the form of ndilei is sociologically important because invoked as an explanation of child deaths, and its removal is sociologically and psychologically important as a means of reintegrating the community, in the style of a witch-cleansing movement. Whether people actually possess ndilei which they treasure as halei nyamui seems far less important than the undoubted fact that it is generally believed that ndilei as a manifestation of hale nyamui does exist and acts as a means of social control to reinforce social and family values by posing the threat

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[1] op.cit. p.78, (Harris, W.T. and Sawyerr, H., pp.77-80, say: "ndilei holders are usually persons without any marital connexions, e.g. an unattached woman, or man, sometimes of middle age" p. "The owners are generally speaking old women", p.78. My own experience is consonant with the first of these statements but the male:female incidence, I found about equal, and many people said men were as commonly accused as women. I was very closely involved with three "performances" by the kɛmamɔi and conclude that the accused were innocent in the sense that the ndilei was 'planted' on them and a confession extracted by the threat of force and other sanctions, though important scapegoats for the attribution and explanation of sickness and death in the community.

of hale nyamui against anyone who fails in his duty. People who believe ndilei will harm their children, are likely to be well disposed to the old or single, in case they should exact reprisals, and conversely should be reminded about their domestic responsibilities towards spouse and offspring.

Ndilei is popularly associated with the death of babies, but hale nyamui is also believed to attack adults in the form of sibɛngui.[1] Mende refer to it as witch-craft,[2] but they refer to ndilei in the same way, and I prefer to see both as manifestations of sorcery. Sibɛngui is perhaps confused with tingɔi in people's minds: It is like a stone, flat and red in the centre, and shiny. People associate it with blood and destruction and its range of influence is explained as the same as for ndilei. But sibɛngui is more expensive and even more feared by adults. Though it cannot cause death it is believed to be able to paralyze and otherwise incapacitate adults by sucking the blood from a limb, and also to be fatal to children, like ndilei. As with ndilei, sibɛngui will periodically need refreshing with blood, and the person who sells it will advise the new owner when it needs to be thus fed. To make sibɛngui it is necessary first to obtain the right stone (naturally occurring), then to pour a mixture of leaves and water (forming a reddish liquid) on the stone which is then suffused with "blood". When the hale nyamui needs feeding, the owner may either take ndilei or sibengui hidden about his person and visit the victim in the daytime, or obtain articles from the victim - nail parings,

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[1] Innes, G. (1969), gives sebɛngui: "a medicine in the republic of Guinea." . . . this is very different from the explicit definition and description I obtained.

[2] Not hɔnei, meaning 'witch spirit', but something operated by a hɔnamɔi - a possessor of 'witch-power'. (cf. p.210 supra.)

hair, or a scrap of clothes. Then at night the owner will dream of the victim, and from then on the victim becomes increasingly sick; or if a child, it will die.

Ndilei and sibɛngui are then, objects which are impregnated with power or halei, owned and operated by individuals, for evil ends. Other kinds of hale nyamui are less extreme but generically the same: all are used for socially disapproved ends, not simply to cause harm or redress, which in certain circumstances is socially approved. Sibɛngui and ndilei are believed to tie their owners in a Faustian relationship[1] which becomes more demanding with time. For luck in hunting, sexual favours, influence of all kinds, the hale nyamui is exacting and will turn the owner into a virtual slave. The only escape seems to be to avail of the armistice offered by kɛmamɔi before he undertakes to "discover" the hale nyamui, or the comparative freedom but lack of social status or respect, which follows upon discovery by the kɛmamɔi.

One of the uses of gbanyɛi, previously mentioned, is to kill an enemy, but there does not seem to be the same kind of sorcerer-familiar relationship between the owner and his gbanyɛi, and the owner and ndilei or sibɛngui.

Many hale nyamui are called by descriptive names like gbanyɛi, "pliers", and such halei is believed to be localized when a prayer "ad rem" is said. I once witnessed an amnesty by a kɛmamɔi during which a remarkable range of objects: corked bottles; rags; even a desiccated human hand, were brought forward. Most people had never heard of them all - certainly never seen them,

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[1] Compare ndɔgbɔjusui - in Chapter Three, supra.

yet all were classed as hale nyamui and believed to be used to obtain (socially disapproved) influence and power. The ndului is a bird which cries morning or evening, and as well as being regarded as a bird of omen, the word is used for a hale nyamui. People believe that a purveyor of bad halei cannot eat this bird or he will die, but that he may obtain halei containing part of it, with the injunction never to eat the bird. Ndului feathers can also be used as protection from witches, if kept in the rafters of the house. Ndului then is a polyvalent symbol, associated with halei, and typical of many things in nature which are feared, respected or provocative of ambivalent attitudes.

A fuller presentation of hale nyamui cannot be undertaken here. Some ethnographic detail exists in the literature already quoted, and can be fitted into my scheme, showing that Mende are aware of the anti-social use of halei which can be undertaken by individuals and is the focus of feelings of jealousy, hostility, inferiority and the rest.

A final indication that what is believed to exist, and its social relevance, is as, or more important, than what can actually be empirically proven in the area of hale nyamui, is provided by the following incident.

A Mende man who had joined the police fifteen years previously, returned home to contest a position of authority in the Chiefdom. His family did not support his claim saying that he had left them years before. He tried to cajole his family by working locally, but was not as successful as when he had been a

policeman. His explanation was that he could no longer go hunting at night (the best time), since his family put hale nyamui in the bush to prevent his catching anything. He believed in the hostility of his family, and it satisfied him as an explanation. His family presumably felt he had lost the "common touch" for hunting, confirming their belief that he had become urbanized. The real existence of hale nyamui was unnecessary: the belief was sufficient.

But there remains a manifestation of hale nyamui so far unmentioned. This concerns the existence and operation of hale nyamui by a group of people rather than by an individual, and which is believed to pose a much greater threat to law, order and the safety of society as a whole, than do individual practitioners of hale nyamui.

4-3.2 Anti-social halei and the group

We noted that the use of halei, for anti-social ends, was sociologically important in terms both of explanation for certain misfortunes, and as a kind of social control. By this I am not presuming to make a slavishly functional interpretation of the ethnographic facts, and must point out that for the Mende, use of bad halei is reprehensible. But when we came to consider groups of people who use halei for evil ends it needs to be said that all Mende spoken to, while believing in the existence, past or present, of halei used in the practice of "cannibalism", were quick to point to this as an aberration, a monstrosity, and a completely unjustifiable deviation from ordinary behaviour. While admitting

that some individuals are sometimes tempted to use hale nyamui and should be condemned yet possibly forgiven if they desist, no mercy was to be shown to "cannibals", who were completely perverted. I record here the vehemence of the Mende language in discussions of "cannibalism", lest it appear that I am suggesting that the religious system of the Mende allows for or incorporates cannibalism: it does not and never has done. Cannibalism is regarded as a reality brought about by the maleficence of perverted minds who avail themselves of halei in a "sacrilegious" context.[1]

Three main "societies" or groups of people have been identified as using halei nyamui, called bɔfimɛi.[2] They are the Alligator, Leopard, and Baboon people, very similar in intent and each operating in areas where alligators, baboons, or leopards were numerous. Their intention seems to have been variable, but was basically to achieve power, luck, and success. Two quotations are relevant here. The Executive Council of Sierra Leone in 1892, discussed the matter and a statement was made that

> "the murders committed by the so-called human leopards were originally and usually connected with religion",[3]

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[1] Lindskog, B. (1954) p.44. He mentions that the Chief was sometimes involved. This same point is made by Beatty, K. (1915). But my point stands that the populace in general feared and repudiated Leopard, etc. behaviour.
The question of the physical reality of cannibalism as opposed to ritual killing, is not under consideration here. My point concerns the use of halei nyamui - bɔfimɛi - which needed human parts for its confection. Cannibalism as such is another question.
cf. Lindskog, pp.17-18 (bɔfimi). p.60ff (cannibalism), and Harrell-Bond, B. (1975).

[2] "bɔfima" is the indefinite singular form: bɔfimɛi, the definite singular. Some authors use bɔfima or borfima, but the definite singular bɔfimɛi is the form generally elicited.

[3] loc.cit. p.59.

and the connection between bɔfimɛi and colonial oppression or influence is interestingly stated in terms of the ability of bɔfimɛi to ensure

> "supremacy over the white man, . . . the white man not being able to find out what was being done, and the eating of human flesh would give power over the white man. For, say they, the white men have more power than the black men; but in this cannibalism you get some power so that when you do wrong you will not be found out by the white man." [1]

The references to religion and power in this context reinforce our view of bɔfimɛi as halei and the fact that it should not be facilely equated with "medicine" or "society". The members "belonged to a conspiracy which functioned under pretended supernatural powers",[2] and this kind of phrase recurring in the literature, is perfectly consonant with my definition and account of halei. From documents relating to "Leopard-society" trials and interpretations in print, the only main points of agreement on what happened in the Leopard-, Baboon-, and Alligator[3]-Societies among the Mende, are that there was ritual murder and that halei - simply spoken of as "medicine" in most accounts - was involved in a central role.

There is no conclusive proof that there actually existed a "Secret-Society" composed of men acting as leopards, alligators or baboons and engaging in concerted murder and cannibalism,[4] and to go into metaphorical use or other linguistic jungles is impossible

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[1] Berry, R. (quoted in Lindskog, B. (1954) p.61). The first occurrence of the word "power" here, is unremarkable, but the second shows the quality of the power not as kpayɛi, but much closer to halei.

[2] Lindskog, B. (1954) p.62.

[3] op.cit. pp.88ff, 182ff.

[4] op.cit. pp.200-203.

here. What needs to be explicated is the relationship between people and halei, and one possible relationship, bearing in mind that halei can be used nefariously, is that between groups of people and hale nyamui used for socially disruptive purposes.

The existence of bɔfimɛi is believed by Mende people; its use is generally associated with ritual or cannibalistic killings. People were not infrequently killed by marauding animals, and that fact at least may have provided for the popular association of hale nyamui, (bɔfimɛi), and heinous crimes attributed to secret groups of people. Facts such as marks on the buttocks, whistles, weapons, dress[1] and other artefacts, could be associated with putative "leopard murders" whether or not they were originally used for such a purpose or not. The "Tongo Players", a group of self appointed sanctioners of leopard murders,[2] drew attention to the possibility of hale nyamui being used against society.

Here then, is a possibility, known to the Mende people and believed in, of furthering his ambition by the perverted use of halei in the company of like minded people or those tricked and blackmailed into joining.[3] The existence of hale nyamui used by, as well as against groups, is a logical possibility in terms of my scheme: it does not go unnoticed by the Mende. But to put it in the category of "Secret Societies" such as Pɔrɔ or Bundu (Sande), would be wrong, as we will see when we deal with such "Societies".

Our interest in the bɔfimɛi and its use, then, is in terms of the logically possible manifestations of halei, but it is not just an antiquarian interest. Though not uniquely associated

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[1] op.cit. pp.19,25ff.

[2] op.cit. pp.63f,95ff: (Kalous, M. (1974)).

[3] op.cit. p.28.

with Leopard- and other "societies", bɔfimɛi is mostly seen in the context of some kind of ritual (group) murder and appears in Sierra Leone no earlier than 1860, though unsubstantiated claims for dates as early as 1810 have been made.[1] In other words its occurrence became known and apparently increasingly obvious, as the British influence was extended over the coastline and hinterland of present-day Sierra Leone. Though white people were not victims, this does not destroy the possibility that some people believed they could increase their power through its use,[2] and Chiefs would have been particularly anxious to stand firm against what many feared was the encroachments of Imperial Power and the consequent whittling away of their own. Recourse to halei would surely have been seen as a possibility if not an unjustifiable one. Whatever did happen, one thing is certain: that increasingly the general populace were made aware of ghoulish practices backed by at least circumstantial evidence.

By the time the Missions were becoming established in Mende country in the early part of the century, the Mende had revolted in the Hut Tax War of 1898 and were reputedly involved in cannibalism and bɔfimɛi, culminating in the trials in 1912 of which Beatty wrote.[3] To what extent this informed the Catholic missionary view of the Mende people: whether missionaries generalized the stories and considered cannibalism as part of mainstream Mende life;

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[1] op.cit. pp.9-11

[2] See pp.219-221 supra.

[3] Beatty, K.L. (1915).

and how Mende missionary relations were affected both by missionary understanding of the situation and by Mende feelings about missionaries' views, is an important consideration here, as is the question of Mende attitudes to bɔfimei and cannibalism as problems which they had to deal with.

In 1912 at the height of the disturbances concerning "leopard society", a Mission journal records

> "27 July. More than a hundred soldiers stationed in —— barracks, searching rigorously for the Leopard People. These hundred men were ordered to build a jail - then were arrested - more than fifty had the leopard mark and were kept in jail. Others were ordered to reveal all they knew. Three Paramount Chiefs were arrested, having the mark." [4]

Three months later in Bonthe, the French-speaking diarist recalled quaintly:

> "Since a few months there is a great fear all over the country. In the last three or four years some strange case (sic) happened up the country; some persons disappeared without anybody knowing of their disappearing. Some rests of bones gave very founded suspicion of "cannibalism" committed by a secret society . . . [the] assistant D.C. after having meditated his "plan de campagne" of destroying the society, went in making some arrestation. He began with the Chiefs of —— and —— . . . Whoever is found wearing the famous mark on the waist is taken and led into captivity. "Signum bestiae." People are frightened at only name of [D.C.]. At his approach people leave their little rooms. All this has a great influence on the trade . . . nobody sees the end of it. The government itself is getting anxious . . . " [2]

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[1] N.D. C.S.Sp. Pujehun Journal.

[2] N.D. C.S.Sp. Bonthe Journal, 14.10.1912.

The inverted commas round the word "cannibalism", are in the original, though whether this means that the diarist did not consider physical cannibalism to be the issue, is unfortunately not clear. What is clear is that Catholic missionaries were aware of the uproar in the country in 1912.[1] The implications of this will have to be considered.

Likewise the Mende people were swept up into the prevailing fear and suspicion, which lasted in muted form until very recently. I once met a young man running for his life down an up-country road, and as I was in a car, stopped for him. He was terrified and swore that "the men" were chasing him "for bɔfimɛi" - i.e. to kill him. He explained it by reference to the current political elections, saying big men from Freetown sent raiding parties for bɔfimei to secure their re-election: presumably a latter-day form not connected with halei in the traditional sense, but nevertheless feared as a reality.

In 1960 in a certain Chiefdom there were

> "baboon reports. Human fat alleged to have been got, to secure election and make Y popular";

and as late as 1974,

> "Man arrested for giving his sister as victim. He denied [it]. Later rumours that he was chasing his step grand-daughter. No evidence. Case closed."

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[1] A case history from the mid 1890's, survives in the "Bulletin de la Congregation" of the Holy Ghost Fathers. Tome V1. 1896-7, describing an attempted "alligator-society" murder ten miles or so from Bonthe (Sherbro). The victim was a Mende. Native law imposed the sentence of burning the guilty alive. The record says that eighty at a time, were so executed. The case cited refers to Sherbro, and Imperi (sic) country, but does not identify "Alligator" murderers with Mende people: indeed the "Alligator-Society" was much more a Sherbro than a Mende institution, though the Leopard and Baboon people, whose behaviour was formally similar, included Mende people, and terrorized Mende country proper, according to accounts.

Such cases, together with the wealth of documented evidence and my own experience and information, support the judgement of an indigenous belief in a hale nyamui which is not located in a Secret Society of the Pɔrɔ-type, is generally known as bɔfimɛi, (though tilei, nessi, and toniahun,[1] were variously associated with it), and was purveyed by people who worked characteristically in a group. For the present purposes, this is sufficient: we have now explicated the concept halei both in a social and an anti-social context, as well as for individual or group use.

4-4 HALEI, TWINS, AND GBƐSE[2]

At the end of the previous chapter, we saw that there are returning children and deformed babies, who are regarded as having certain characteristics of spirits, good or bad, and in the sense that they were anomalous - as explained - could be dealt with briefly in a coda to the section on spirits. There is another group - twins, and gbɛse - which presents similar problems of classification, and they are accredited with, among other things, special access to halei. They do show, however, "spiritual" behaviour which is also out of the ordinary, so that they do not fit handily as a coda to the present section on halei.

They are considered here for convenience, bearing in mind their logical and categorial claim to consideration under the heading ngafanga, but also because a short discussion of twins prepares

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[1] Lindskog, B. (1954) p.18.

[2] fig.13, p.225 infra.

POWER AND ANOMALOUS POWER — FIG. 13

C R E A T O R — NGEWƆ

POWER: halei	'SOCIAL halei'	'ANTI-SOCIAL halei'
Related to the INDIVIDUAL	for protection, cure of individual illness, or legitimate redress via halemɔi luki etc.	for causing sickness, ill-fortune, or revenge, and illegitimate redress, etc. via ndilei
Related to the GROUP	'Specialist' cures medicines and 'Societies' - i.e. groups with access to specific halei - kpaa, hale wa etc.	bɔfimɛi: used by Leopard, Baboon and Alligator "Societies"
ANOMALOUS: halei (and 'spirit') related both to GROUPS and to INDIVIDUALS	gbɛse felanga - twins; sawa velanga - triplets	

C R E A T I O N

MAN

the way to some extent for a discussion of witches, and increases our documentation on the importance of dreams, about which more will be said.

That multiple human births are unusual: that the birth of twins is heralded in a dream, unlike the birth of individual children: that twins are accredited with certain special powers: and that the spirits of twins are a force to be reckoned with and unlike other children's spirits, are to a significant degree feared and to be placated: these are facts accepted by Mende people and cumulatively provide the basis for speaking of twins as anomalies.

When Mende speak of twins, notions of Ngewɔ, halei and dreams figure prominently. The subject is rich and complex and needs a more complete treatment; here we can only deal with twins rather summarily.

"Ngewɔ", said a gbɛse (the person born after twins, and ritually important for twin ceremonies and burials, as well as being an interpreter of twin behaviour and expectations to their parents) "divides all men into twins and other people. They are specially protected by Ngewɔ, and do not need charms" or certain other kinds of halei.

To recapitulate an earlier point:[1] though everyone has a spirit, ngafa, the word for spirit is only used in the context of ancestors and in the collocation ngafa nyamui which refers to

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[1] Explained in greater detail, pp.144,159 supra.

"capricious", non-ancestral spirits. Ngafa is used as a term denoting social relevance in several senses: "ancestors are ngafanga" (their mode of existence is as spirits institutionally translated to the state of ancestorhood by the tenjamɛi ceremony); "that person has a ngafa" (meaning that the spiritual part of that person is uncharacteristically active as a 'possessor' of the person concerned); "We Mende believe in ngafanga" (being an all embracing term inclusive of jinanga). Though each person has a spirit, this is an unremarkable fact of existence and the word ngafa is not used. But twins' spirits are spoken of, since they are remarkable, powerful and manifest their existence differently from the spirits of ordinary human beings. Twin spirits are spoken of freely as being more powerful than others, and for this reason, people fear or are wary of twins. Just as groups of ancestors or individual ancestors are believed to have power or jurisdiction to protect families and land, so twins' spirits are believed to be powerful protectors of farms. For this and other benefits they bring, twins are respected and humoured, as well as feared. The termite hill kɔkɔi is important here. These phallus-shaped mounds perhaps 18" high are used as "altars" for twin ceremonies, and erected either in the house or field, where the spirits of the twins guard the family and land from attacks by hale nyamui and witchcraft. Family may keep their treasured valuables near these altars, and they will be inviolate because the area is guarded by spirits.

Twins in fact are called witches, but in the sense that theirs is a witch spirit (hɔnɛi) rather than a maleficent power

consciously bent on destruction (hɔnamɔi);[1] and twins are associated with witches it seems, not because they are evil but because being born with a "witch spirit" gives them power of protecting themselves and their families from witch attacks. Ordinary people need protection of various kinds (halei), perhaps particularly against witches who are the most feared agents: but twins have protection direct from Ngewɔ, not through halei which is here redundant. Twins can protect the house and its occupants up to the verandah overhang. Bats, particularly white bats which are much more noticeable and skim around the eaves of houses, are popularly seen as the spirits of twins protecting the house.[2]

I said twins do not need halei in the same way as other people yet I put them in this section on halei since, because we have defined halei essentially as a manifestation of the protective (and other) power of Ngewɔ, and because twins are believed to share (directly) in his protection, they may be seen as sharing the quintessence of halei. This they also use as a sanction on people's

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[1] The distinction hɔnɛi (> spirit); hɔnamɔi (> witch "power") is very important, but hɔnamɔi is also a term applied to a witch-host. We will consider this matter under witchcraft proper in the next chapter, but cf. Little, K.L. (1967) pp.230-1.

[2] gbɛse is also believed to be a hɔnɛi - again benevolent if not provoked. The relation of twins and gbɛse to witchcraft is complicated and somewhat confused among informants. It seems best to see twins and gbɛse as constituting a unit for the protection of the house and family from witchcraft.

twins are felanga: triplets sawa-velanga ("three twins"). The third of triplets seems functionally analogous to gbɛse as regards the other two. The third triplet is called sowa (def. sowɛi) and has powerful halei from birth. It is also very important for pɔrɔ halei. Whether the third of triplets was once the leader - sowɛi - of Bundu, is very possible but unproven: no informant was sure, though most were intrigued.

behaviour, with the ability to make people deaf or lame - an ability sometimes explained as deriving from the spirits of twins, as well as from their power as twins.

Gbɛse is believed more powerful than twins, not because his spirit is more powerful, but because he has access to halei, the ability to "speak to" spirits (an ability shared to some extent by twins but not by 'ordinary' people), and a social position as a mediator between twins and others. He is also an interpreter of twins' wishes and activity, often a halemɔi.[1] He controls the twins in a dual sense: firstly, he can intervene to stop one harming the other, and secondly he can "beg" a twin spirit to desist from harming parents or townspeople. Gbɛse, understanding and communicating with spirits, can interpret a situation in which twins' spirits are involved, and prescribe remedies of behaviour, offerings or other ceremonies, for the parents or an afflicted person to perform. Without gbɛse, parents may unwittingly offend the twins, they say.

We include under the rubric "twins", gbɛse and triplets, since the Mende see them as part of the same phenomenon. Moreover we have to include another group - those single births which the

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[1] This usually applies particularly to the senior gbɛse in any vicinity, due to the lack of demand for several gbɛse or halemɔi: perhaps two or three at the most, would find work as interpreters or halemɔi. Twins are regarded as powerful and potentially dangerous in their early years particularly: after puberty they seem to be less of a nuisance and less demanding, though they retain powers they were born with. Unfortunately it is impossible to include all my material here, or this section would become a full chapter.

Mende refer to as "twin" births, due either to a dream or other experience of the mother, which signals that she is pregnant with twins, or due to the belief that two foetuses were conceived, but the spirit of one dominated and "ate" the other. "Twins" therefore, are not simply a plural physical phenomenon but members of a class of people with an unusual manifestation of spirit and the power of Ngewɔ, and this is the cruicial point to make in this very foreshortened section.

A pregnant woman will dream that she is going to have twins, (often by dreaming of two snakes at the riverside) or see two snakes during pregnancy. This establishes the fact of "twin birth", whether her issue is multiple or not. Sometimes the mother is not the one to have a dream, but the spirit(s) of her unborn twin(s) appear to another twin in the town or indeed any person, who will then have recourse to a gbɛse for interpretation of the dream, either directly, or through the pregnant woman, whom the dreamer advises of his dream.

Twins are believed to be almost always hostile towards each other and their spirits fight for supremacy. Likewise twins are considered antagonistic towards parents very often: sometimes both hate the same parent, but more often they hate different parents. Should the twins be in agreement, or the dominant one convert the weaker one, then the parent who is hated, will become sick and even die. If the twins disagree, then the more powerful may kill the less powerful, or both will struggle in a state of stalemate. Whatever the situation on the spiritual level, events on the empirical level will have an explanation - for

example the sickness or death of one twin, of both, or of the mother or father. Consequently both parents will do their utmost to placate both twins, and the mother will want to bear another child - gbɛse - to mediate in the situation. Even the birth of a "single twin" can be explained by reference to this struggle between the spirits of the twins. But if parents welcome the twins and treat them impartially and kindly, then they will benefit from the power which twins have for use in the family context.

The twins reveal in dreams their destiny, likes and dislikes, taboos and temperament; when this has been interpreted by a gbɛse, the parents know more or less what to expect. But if a twin promises to be extremely demanding, the parent may expose it to the hot sun in a bid to discipline its spirit. This "cooking the twins" is not designed to kill them, so much as to make them obedient to their parents and aware of parental rights. If however, the ploy does not succeed, the twins can retaliate by inflicting scabies in the parents' ear: a condition which gbɛse is believed to be able to cure.

But protection afforded by twins, is substantial too. They can intimate where their father should make his farm for the best results, show him which areas to avoid, and bring a modicum of prosperity to the family. In the relationship of checks and balances between twins and family, the Mende parents are afforded yet another source of "power" and hence access to the benison of Ngewɔ through twins.

Non-twins or people who have no twins in the family, are likely to make unsubstantiated statements about twins showing that

they are strange and capricious: generally though, such people, while maintaining a certain reserve or respect for the potential of twins, are incurious. Those however who are parents or family of twins - or twins themselves - seem to enjoy embellishing their attributes and power, and exaggerating their area of effective control, thus pointing to twins as a privileged access to extra protection and kudos.

To the extent that twins operate as a unit, they are sometimes referred to as having one spirit animating both. For single twins and gbɛse this presents no problem, but many people say that twins and triplets have individual spirits. Perhaps twins are spoken of as ngafa in terms of their twinness, rather than in terms of their individuality. Yet this by no means neatly solves a question which the Mende are seemingly content to see as unproblematical, or to leave unraised in this form.

Gbɛse must demonstrate his influence to become important. This he may do by mediating between "twins" and parents and interpreting the wishes of twins. He is, once acknowledged powerful, partially responsible for keeping witches from the town since his halei and his status give him more power over witches than twins enjoy. Also since he is reckoned to be a hɔnɛi, if witchcraft is suspected in a town, gbɛse will be first called to account and to use his halei. Knowing he is likely to be under some suspicion, presumably ensures that gbɛse only uses his halei and his hɔnɛi for good, and against witchcraft. The apparent paradox of gbɛse being a hɔnɛi and yet working against witchcraft is explained by the fact

that Ngewɔ, in Mende understanding, made gbɛse (and twins) "quasi-witches".[1] As the kemamɔi has an analogous power to see ndilemɔi and ndilei (and is therefore sometimes spoken of as a kind of witch), so with gbɛse.[2]

The characteristics of "twinness" and gbɛse then, are a special manifestation of spirit, and an above average control of the power of Ngewɔ - either direct or through halei. There is some ambivalence towards twins and gbɛse, but they play an important role in Mende religion as channels of the power of Ngewɔ to society, in terms of groups or individuals. Twins and gbɛse relate primarily to groups - the family - but not insignificantly to individuals, especially as regards the ancillary occupation of halemɔi.

No more can be said in the present context: I hope enough information has been given here to situate twins and gbɛse in Mende belief, thought and religion.

4-5 CONCLUSION

Halei as seen in this chapter, manifests itself in a variety of forms, all of which are related to the transmission of the power of Ngewɔ to mankind. In view of my analytic perspective

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[1] cf. p.227-8 supra.

[2] This condition is not dissimilar to that of a person with an antidote injection consisting in part, of the very disease he wishes to avoid. The kemamɔi and gbese have the antidote to sorcery and witchcraft respectively: as such they contain the disease itself in some form at least.

of halei and individuals, halei and groups, and halei used for good or evil,[1] it should not be necessary to prolong the argument by laboriously summarising why I think that halei should be looked at not simply as useful as a "separator",[2] (i.e. for separating or setting apart individuals or groups), but equally important as a means of aggregation. People come together to participate in halei for many reasons, not simply to separate from those who do not have this or that halei. Halei in fact promotes social cohesion in many cases that we have seen. I will in fact take up this point later in respect of certain large "Secret Societies" so called, but wish to emphasise now that though some recent work has gone some way to 'demythologizing' "Secret Societies", it has arrived at the right conclusions for the wrong reasons. Halei has an important social as well as an individual importance: to consolidate people in groups. The logical opposite of aggregation is segregation, but segregation as a principle to explain or demystify secret societies, is psychologically as well as sociologically suspect.

Halei is for grouping and creating and maintaining social boundaries, as well as for separating, destroying and breaking down certain existing groupings. Some kind of halei is used to create or destroy all the socially recognized - not necessarily approved - groupings and deployments of people. Conversely, no socially relevant grouping (apart from the family group, which is controlled by ngafanga) exists, outside the purview of halei of some kind.

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[1] Objectively speaking, of course. Hale nyamui is subjectively seen - "sub specie bono" - as good, in the sense of desirable.

[2] Jędrej, M.C. (1976).

An analysis of halei in terms of Horton's thesis, (Chapter Three, p.117, supra), discussed in the previous chapter, can now be seen to be productive, and his hypothesis is indeed more productive in this context, than simply in terms of groups which mobilize in relation to various ngafanga. And insofar as halei is used to separate, then it is used primarily as an antidote, to restore society to some more acceptable condition. Halei defines, mediates and locates groups and phenomena. As legitimator, and partial rationale of the world and society, anything which does not come within its scope is socially irrelevant or suspect.

The Catholic Church, never having been thoroughly integrated into the Mende belief-system or aggregated to halei, and never having become officially institutionalized into Mende culture, was in a parlous position as regards bridging the gap between traditional Mende culture and Christianity. To implement its policies, one can deduce that either it had to be officially accepted and take its place within the framework of Mende religious belief, or Mende 'traditional' belief and behaviour had to change, seeing Christianity as an alternative system. What actually happened will be explored in later chapters.

Mende belief in spirits and halei should now appear as more comprehensible and cogent. People have resources which can be deployed in various ways to meet a variety of contingencies; and most eventualities occurring within the created world, can be ascribed an explanation, if not by the individual or the group,

then by the official interpreters of events - the tɔtɔgbɛmɔi (diviner) or kemamɔi (witch-finder).

The Mende had to make some judgements about the missionary, his work, and his message, before he could reject or accept it in part or as a whole. But t h a t what he saw of the missionary, and t h a t the interpretations he arrived at, were the same as what the missionary hoped he would see and interpret, is something we cannot simply assume to be the case.

If Mende explanations of events were related to his ideas of the world, then either he would appreciate Missionary policy as relevant or irrelevant to his own beliefs, or he would find his own ideas of the world challenged by the premises of a world religion. In assessing Mende reaction to Christian missions we have to assess the extent to which change was already "in the air" due to the influence not only of Islam but also of the British presence; and we have to consider not only the essential content of Christianity but how that was apprehended by the Mende, and whether and where there was a 'fit' between Christianity and Mende belief and thought.[1] To this end, the analysis of Mende ideas of spirits and power, (fig.11, p.173, and fig.13, p.225), concluded in the next chapter, is a necessary preamble.

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[1] Horton, R. (1967) passim.

CHAPTER FIVE:

"SECRET SOCIETIES", WITCHCRAFT, AND OPPORTUNITY

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5-1 "SECRET SOCIETIES", SPIRITS (ngafanga) AND POWER (halei)

The data in this chapter are not as complete as those in Chapters Three and Four. The reason for this is quite simple. I had not realized the full importance of the "Secret Societies" initially, and was not making a specific study of them. But it became clearer in the course of the work, that they were a central panel in the scheme which was developing from my study. This chapter therefore, confines itself to an overview of the "Secret Societies", showing how they fit into the proposed scheme to explicate the articulation of Mende religion, belief and thought. The good ethnographic detail already available in print and referred to in this chapter, needs to be reanalyzed in terms of my proposed scheme, and to do so fully here, would involve very extensive coverage. Though I have a large amount of material, particularly on the Wunde Society which is currently enjoying a vogue in Mende country and indeed beyond, it is not yet so complete as could be wished for, and is largely omitted in this analysis, leaving us with the broad lines of an explanatory model, proposed at the end of this chapter.

Witchcraft too, as the antithesis of "Secret Societies" inasmuch as it involves the use of power (halei) and the activity of

spiritual agencies (ngafanga) for anti-social ends, is also covered only briefly; but it is hoped to show how witchcraft can be contextualized in Mende belief and thought, so that a more thorough going treatment may follow later, or that other students may test the validity of the model presented here.

This chapter completes the analysis which is required before we can understand the effect of Missionary enterprise on the Mende people, and the encounter of the Catholic religion with Mende religious ideas.

Through the analytic focus on spirits (ngafanga) and power (halei), it has been possible to include many ethnographic data within a framework which helps the observer to appreciate a rationale and coherence in Mende belief and thought, ritual and religion. And while discerning something of collective representations, we also accommodate a range of choices and constraints experienced by individuals and groups. It becomes clear that the religious system of the Mende must be seen as embedded in social, economic, political and kinship institutions, and that the religious dimension of these institutions cannot be totally divorced from them, if one is to make sense of spirits and power in Mende life. The ecological approach[1] is, I believe, necessary and justified in terms both of the results it yields, and of the fact that the composite picture of Mende culture thus projected, retains some of the élan of the existential reality and is not merely a sterile typology unrecognizable to students of Mende life and thought, whether native or expatriate.

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[1] cf. Chapter Three, p.77.

So far, ngafanga and halei have been polarized, the better to consider Mende attitudes to each, separately; it now remains to consider whether and when spirits and power operate simultaneously, and whether, seeing them in the one setting discloses information relevant to the present thesis.

There are two major institutions or sets of institutions among the Mende, which cannot be understood properly except in the context of both spirits and power; and they are sociologically differentiated from institutions already mentioned, insofar as the latter could be explicated simply within the framework of either "spirits" or "power". In the first place, some of the 'Major Secret Societies' will be discussed, and then witchcraft in Mende life.

We have already alluded to what were described as "specialist societies" which possessed halei, often obtained after a dream or similar experience: these "Societies" were small, rather localized groups which initiated or aggregated members for particular reasons such as the treatment of impotence, certain types of wounds, snake bites, luck and good fortune. They are generally controlled by families of the descendants of an individual, who obtained specific halei for a well-defined purpose. The "Societies" most commonly cited in the literature, however, are Pɔrɔ and Sande, (Bundu): the former for all the males, and the latter for all the females of Mende stock. It is to a consideration of these that we now turn.

One of the most noticeable associations made by students of Mende culture, and most noticeable to anyone living in Mende country,

is that between certain "Societies" and their "Society devils".[1] An important problem is this: whether all "Societies" have "devils", or whether only some do; and why.

Reinhardt[2] talks of four major "secret societies",[3] with each of which she associates costumed spirits. She does not enter the lists to discuss the basis on which the four (Pɔrɔ, Sande, Humɔi, Njayei) are designated "major" Societies,[4] and says nothing about costumed spirits associated with any other - minor? - Societies. As far as my own knowledge goes, she is certainly correct in associating spirits with the four Societies she isolates, and interestingly, her independent conclusions[5] are compatible with my own analysis, which distinguishes "Societies" associated with both spirits and power, from those associated with either but not both.

Reinhardt says[6] that her concern is with "non-ancestral spirits, called cultic Spirits", but points out too, that

> "Poro's authority ultimately rests on its access to the powerful ancestral spirits of its hereditary officials, and on their control of powerful medicines, hale."[7]

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[1] "Devils" is the word most commonly used by literate Mende people as a blanket-term for masked figures (public), as well as for unseen (private) spirits in general.

[2] Reinhardt, L.R. (1973) MSS.

[3] op.cit. p.4.

[4] Little, K.L. (1967) does not have any explanation for the proliferation of Societies and their designation as "major" and "minor".

[5] I received a draft of the Reinhardt paper only after drafting this and the two previous chapters.

[6] op.cit. (1973) p.3.

[7] op.cit. p.6.

The association of spirits - ancestral and non-ancestral - and halei, with Pɔrɔ and other "major" Societies, has indeed been noted by previous authors, yet the significance of this association, and the comparative importance and sociological relevance of the "major" and "minor" Societies, does not seem to have been adequately demonstrated.

In the previous chapter we looked briefly at the relationship between Njayei and individuals who are not members but who wish to benefit from Njaye halei; we did not consider Njayei from the point of view of those who are members by virtue of family ties, and who can invoke halei and the spirits of the group itself; now, from an overview of four "Major Societies", it is hoped to show how access both to spirits (ngafanga) and to power (halei) is a defining characteristic for each (fig. 14), serving to distinguish them from the institutions studied above (Chapter Four). The following discussion will illustrate this point only.

FIG. 14

Socio-religious groupings (Secret Societies) Humɔi, Njayei, Pɔrɔ, Sande, (Wunde)	
LEGITIMATION AND MAINTENANCE THROUGH	
SPIRITS (ngafanga)	POWER (halei)
Public/Private	INDIVIDUAL - aggregation by initiation: 'possession'
Sacred/Secular	by halei : authorization to use certain Pɔrɔ halei
Ancestral/non-ancestral	COLLECTIVE - protection, solidarity, sanctions

5-2 HUMƆI [1]

The word humɔi is not easy to render in English, but the nearest equivalent would seem to be the word "relationship". The phrase "wa taa humɔi" translates as "you and him/her/it, are humɔi", i.e. "you have a certain relationship to each other". When any relationship is spoiled or perhaps unknown, the Humɔi leader[2] may have to be consulted. An underlying premise then, is that there are "correct" relationships between man and his environment, - relationships which are upheld and sanctioned by Humɔi. Humɔi is involved with matters such as the control of sexual relationships; and anything branded as simɔngamɛi (sexual relationships within prohibited degrees) must be submitted to the Humɔi leader in order to perform a ritual purification and restore and reiterate a social norm. A lack of respect for relationships between human beings or their sexual rights, on the one hand, and the fertility of the land (on which the community depends) on the other, may result in crop failure, miscarriage or other such problems which ultimately come to the notice of the Diviner (tɔtɔgbɛmɔi) who attributes them to an infraction of rules governing certain relationships, at which point the Humɔi leader is approached and consulted.

Humɔi promulgates and upholds the moral laws of the Mende people, and all are subject to its authority. The leaders or interpreters who uphold the laws, may be envisaged as leaders of a

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[1] cf. Harris, W.T. and Sawyerr, H. (1968) passim.
Little, K.L. (1967) pp.145-9.

[2] That is, the person accredited with authority to sanction misdemeanours and uphold or restore correct relationships.

"Society", yet to talk of a "Humɔi Society" may well give a false impression to those who have not lived in Mende country, if it is understood to refer to some exclusive body.

Though co-extensive with "the Mende people", Humɔi mobilizes individuals or groups locally and occasionally, for correction of abuses which have damaged relationships. Humɔi has been described quite aptly as a "Church" - that is, the aggregate or assemblage of the faithful.[1] Analogously to the way in which baptism incorporates members into the Christian Church, so Mende girls are incorporated into the social group three days after birth, and boys four days after birth, by the ceremony of sawɛ-e-jawɛi.[2] The point developed here is simply that every Mende is socialized to respect certain norms, rules and regulations or "relationships", and knows that sanctions will be invoked against law-breakers, either through use of halei, or through the action of spirits.[3]

5-2.1 Humɔi and power (halei)

Transgression, proved or inferred, of rules of conduct upheld by the authority vested in Humɔi officials, necessitates the miscreants' submission to Humɔ halei for the purpose of purification and the restoration of right order. Humɔ halei is kept in a house and under the jurisdiction of Katao, a man, and Sɛnga, a woman, the

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[1] N.D. C.S.Sp. (1930) (F), p.32. Also Little, K.L. (1967) p.240.

[2] Not, as far as I know, documented; sawɛi means 'law', and sawɛ-e-jawɛi - "law of laws".

[3] Harris, W.T. and Sawyerr, H. (1968) pp.96ff, distinguish three kinds of humɔi.

hereditary heads,[1] and the halei may be carried by them to another village or its surrounding bush when required. There is not a Humɔi lodge in every village, and many fewer now than two generations ago.

Part of the ceremony consists in "washing" the bush or restoring it to its correct relationship with the world[2] (when for example, the bush has been contaminated by human sexual intercourse - activity which relates to human fertility, not that of the land, and which should take place within the village and not in the bush or fields). My data on Humɔi are very sparse, yet sufficient to establish that halei is definitely associated with Humɔi.[3]

One ceremony consisted of confession of simɔngamɛi, purification of the parties involved, with punishment of the offence and mock-ridicule of the offenders. The procedure is essentially the same as that recorded by Harris (1968: pp.96-8), except for the importance of the concoction used in the "washing" of the people involved. In a large basin was a quantity (more than a quart) of green liquid. Mɛndei,[4] using a sawɛi[5] leaf as an aspergillum,

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[1] Mɛndei is the name of another official who performs a ritual of purification or "washing", "for saving the life" of people guilty of simɔngamɛi, as Mende people say.

[2] Little, K.L. (1967) pp.250-1.

[3] As well as spiritual agencies, cf. Harris, W.T. and Sawyerr, H. op.cit. pp.96ff. Also cf. 5-2.2, p.245 infra.

[4] Harris, W.T. and Sawyerr, H., op.cit. p.96, give "mɛɛ-nde (hear, tell)" Mɛni does mean "hear" and nde means "speak" or "tell". Innes, G., op.cit. gives mɛɛnde - "a member of the Humɔi society" - without any reference to etymology. I was specifically told that mɛndei is not derived from mɛni/nde, and thus write it in the form mɛndei to avoid confusion, though it is tempting to translate mɛni-nde literally, as a descriptive definition of the person in charge of the purification.

[5] sáwɛí = "decoction of leaves", protective "medicine" (Innes, G. op.cit.). sawɛi = "law, rule, commandment". In the present context, a leaf is used in a ceremony designed to enforce law (cf. sawɛ- e -jawɛi). Perhaps there is intentional polyvalence here. sáwɛí is a kind of antidote to deleterious effects of halei and ngafanga.

sprinkled them with liquid and also used the leaf to give a token beating on the heads and shoulders of the six people involved, (a man, the two sisters and their mother, with whom he was alleged to have had sexual intercourse, as well as the two children of one of the sisters, who had confessed when pregnant a third time, and feared a miscarriage as a sanction upon her wrongdoing). The man then had to wash his face, head and shoulders, with the glaucous liquid. A thread joining the six, was then taken off and they were chased down to the river, beaten around the legs and ankles by the assembled crowd, as they went. The atmosphere was quite light-hearted and jocose, though the six were somewhat embarrassed at their public ridicule. Once the ceremony was completed, order was restored, confession and publicity had been promoted, and the pregnancy was presumably made safe.

The halei or power localized in the green concoction was essential to remedying the confusion of relationships caused by simɔngamɛi, as well as to ensuring the safe continuance of the pregnancy and the future fertility of those others involved or likely to be affected by the simɔngamɛi. But implicit in the ceremony, and explicit in the claims of the Mɛndei to authority in the context of Humɔi, is the existence and invocation, not only of halei but of spirits.

5-2.2 Humɔi and spirits (ngafanga)

Though I never saw a representation of one, spirits are associated with Humɔi. Migeod gives the following description:

> "The fibre expands naturally, and so is evidently made to fit his figure when at full length, and contracts when he shortens himself . . . Probably he stoops when in the short position, which is the normal one for moving about." [1]

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[1] Migeod, F.W. (1917) p.254.

This is clearly a description of what is popularly called a Humɔi "devil", though different from the description surviving in a missionary record, of a figure with

> "fibres hung over his body; mask worn on his head - a cowshead with horns." [1]

Reinhardt has identified "non-ancestral spirits, (cultic spirits) associated with various secret societies, and which are represented in material form",[2] and she sees the physical distinction between simple wooden, and composite, masks as important. She classifies the spirits associated with the Societies as "sacred" and "profane" or "secular",[3] and though identifying a "sacred spirit" (humɔi), has no documentation on a corresponding "secular" spirit. We can at least say that there is a Humɔi "devil" which is regarded as an embodiment of a non-ancestral spirit, and further, that during the course of Humɔi ceremonies, an offering is made to the ancestral spirits of the leaders of the humɔi ceremonies.[4/5] More work certainly needs to be done, but the indications are that both ancestral and non-ancestral spirits are associated with Humɔi and invoked in ceremonies.

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[1] N.D. C.S.Sp. (1930) (F) p.16.

[2] Reinhardt, L.R., op.cit. p.3. There are divergencies in our respective interpretations, especially of "Secret Societies" and also of other details, but Reinhardt herself says that her classification is tentative and space does not permit of a full discussion of differences here.

[3] op.cit., p.4.

[4] Harris, W.T. and Sawyerr, H. (1968) p.98.

[5] The names of the original organizers of Humɔi who received the authority from Ngewɔ, are given as Tugbe and Yagboe in N.D. C.S.Sp. (1930) (F), p.14, but again I have no first-hand ethnographic data here.

Before trying to interpret the significance of the characteristic association of both halei and ngafanga with Humɔi, it seems preferable to present the cumulative evidence relating to Njayei, Pɔrɔ and Sande - evidence which is increasingly more convincing.

5-3 NJAYEI [1]

Since everyone is subject to the laws upheld by Humɔi, everyone could be said to belong to the "Humɔi Society", a phrase which is more self explanatory than the term Humɔi alone. More correctly however, everyone comes within the purview of Humɔ halei and Humɔ yafanga (ngafanga). The people with authority to uphold the laws or maintain certain relationships with which Humɔi in general is concerned, are its hereditary members.

Likewise with Njayei: there are hereditary members of the "Njayei Society", - or more properly hereditary participators in the institution known as Njayei, - those patrilineally related to the founders of the various lodges. But in the case of Njayei we distinguished between, on the one hand hereditary members and those aggregated to Njayei by birthright, and those brought within its ambit by virtue of some mental illness which Njayei purports to be able to cure; and on the other, "clients" who patronize Njayei lodges for reasons other than the cure of mental illness.[2]

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[1] cf. Little, K.L. (1967) pp.249-50. Harris, W.T. and Sawyerr, H. (1968) pp. 72,86.

[2] Contra Reinhardt, op.cit., p.23.

In this latter case, Njaye halei is invoked, but not I think, the non-ancestral spirits of the Njayei group. As such, Njayei is a locus of halei only, and was dealt with in the previous chapter:[1] but insofar as it is applied to help mental illness and institutionalize sufferers of such illness, it calls upon and avails of the help of both power (halei) and spirits (ngafanga).

5-3.1 Njayei and power (halei)

The Njayei people I spoke to, denied vehemently that they operated for evil ends; even procuring good luck for someone contesting an election, could not ensure a candidate's success to the detriment of the incumbent of office. Yet one hears from ordinary people that Njaye halei can cause madness and ill-luck, and Harris and Sawyerr seem to believe this to be the case.[2] If so, it is further demonstration of the fact that halei of itself is "neutral" and may be used for immoral as well as moral ends.

The Njayei people certainly claim that their power derives from Ngewɔ; it is one of the things explained by reference to the words Leve njeini - the Supreme Being ordered things thus, for the benefit of mankind.

5-3.2 Njayei and spirits (ngafanga)

Documentation on the spirits associated with Njayei,[3] and on the broad lines of organization,[4] has already appeared; in

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[1] pp.198ff.

[2] op.cit., p.86. ". . . Its members are said to possess 'medicine' for giving good luck and bad luck. But they are also, and indeed more so, believed to be capable of turning people mad as well as of curing madness."

[3] Reinhardt, L.R. (1973), op.cit., pp.24-26.

[4] Little, K.L. (1967) loc.cit.

producing the present synthesis I merely draw attention to the fact that Njeyei members have access to halei and invoke ancestral and non-ancestral ngafanga also, in prayer and sacrifice, to ask for success in their undertakings. Spirits are also believed to punish those who lack respect for Njayei laws and practices. The Njayei members themselves, having originally, so it is claimed, obtained their halei from the river (nja = water) after a dream disclosing its whereabouts, will return periodically to the riverside to invoke spirits specifically associated with Njayei, and not simply river spirits which we considered in Chapter Three (p.146).

Through the appropriation of and communication with power (halei) and spirits (ngafanga) respectively, Humɔi and Njayei interpret, sanction and promulgate laws. The "Sacred" ngafanga cannot communicate directly with the populace, and when their masked spirits dance, they need interpreters who are, classically, the ranking officials of these institutions, who act as intermediaries between Ngewɔ and mankind.

Hall,[1] speaking of initiation (specifically into Pɔrɔ) talks of "ceremonial death, through which candidates enter the world of the spirits of the ancestors". This applies with equal force to initiation into the institutions of Humɔi or Njayei, if we again add the rider that by initiation the candidate is aggregated in a special way into a group with access not only to the "world of the spirits of the ancestors", but also to halei, and non-ancestral spirits.

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[1] Hall, H.U. (1938) p.4.

It is precisely these twin sources, halei and ngafanga which provide for the legitimation and maintenance of those social groups which are more generally relevant and important for social control than are the smaller and more exclusive and private social groups considered in Chapter Four (p.198ff) and possessing access only to halei.

The influence of the ngafanga on the world of the living, was partly explicated in Chapter Three, but in looking at Pɔrɔ and Sande we can now see that the spirits penetrate into a very wide area of social life, not simply limited to families and local groups such as exemplified by Njayei, and that the world of ngafanga and the world of the living come together in Pɔrɔ and Sande to provide the strength and resilience of these groups, and the communication between the two worlds - of the Creator and of creation - and the link between the secular and the sacred aspects of everyday life.[1]

5-4 PƆRƆ

If Humɔi has good claim to be the original, dominant, and all embracing "Society" in Mende country, Pɔrɔ seems to have gradually assumed more specifically secular authority, though able to call on "sacred" sanctions too, in the form of the halei to which it had access and the spirits it invoked. Pɔrɔ became, in Little's words, the "arbiter of culture", but in the widest sense, embracing moral and ritual authority and with a religious as well as a social dimension.

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[1] cf. Fulton (1972) pp.1226ff.

Pɔrɔ, I would argue, is the earthly manifestation - as a social institution - of Mende religious life, and the most well-known arena in which Mende religion is institutionalized. Hence, it would be wrong to look at Pɔrɔ in purely social terms. Pɔrɔ, (and Sande) had access to the most powerful spiritual agencies and halei[1] deriving from Ngewɔ and operating on behalf of mankind. By comparison, other spirits and halei are limited in scope and influence, and applicable to smaller groups and even individuals.

How Pɔrɔ and Sande assumed some of the functions arrogated to Humɔi is not a question on which I can pronounce, except perhaps to say that the more complex the social organization and the more clear cut the division of labour became with the settlement of the Mende in Sierra Leone and Liberia, the more diversified the institutions seem to have become, leading to the formation of more and more "Societies" to deal with specific problems within the context of a variety of sodalities claiming access to halei. But even now, Humɔi is regarded with the respect due to an ancient institution, though demographic movements, urbanization and increasing social mobility have made Humɔi itself less relevant than formerly. Pɔrɔ until recently, would legislate where necessary, for the existence and scope of the smaller Societies which, in the face of Western and Muslim influence, are becoming rarer and less well patronized except in the more remote areas.[2]

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[1] Rodney, W. op.cit., p.62, note 2, says that the powerful are marked by Pɔrɔ, because they showed the power of the ancestors [spirits] to the people.

[2] Little, K.L. (1948b) p.129. "In the old days it is probable that their [i.e. Specialist Societies, e.g. Pɔrɔ, Sande] monopoly was even greater and that it excluded much of the 'private' practice evident nowadays on the part of mɔri-men and related practitioners."

5-4.1 Pɔrɔ and power (halei)

We have seen some of the ways in which halei is apprehended and used in Mende society, as well as its legitimation through dreams and its derivation from the Supreme Being: - Leve njeini. Pɔrɔ (and Sande too) says Little, are "specialist bodies" [2] which have authority over halei, though I prefer to distinguish them from those "Specialist Societies" dealt with in Chapter Four, precisely because Pɔrɔ and Sande have both spirits (ngafanga) and power (halei), which strengthen their authority.

In the most general sense, Pɔrɔ halei compels obedience and conformity to Pɔrɔ rules and regulations, and chastizes outsiders who flout its code. Thus, Pɔrɔ halei was believed to cause unmentionable illness[2] (chiefly infertility) to women who transgressed into Pɔrɔ bush, and the threat of sanctions by Pɔrɔ halei was usually enough to ensure the conformity of the group of initiates and to prevent curiosity or interference, as indeed Sande halei did for its part, causing - so it was believed - bosin (scrotal elephantiasis) in men who looked on ceremonial unlawfully. The threat of the sanction of Pɔrɔ- or Sande halei then, was sufficiently impressive, and it would not be necessary for individuals to have explicit knowledge of the various problems it was believed able to cause; unaccountable sickness could be attributed by a diviner (tɔtɔgbɛmɔi) to transgressions of Pɔrɔ or Sande laws, and thus a whole compendium of sicknesses would come to be seen as evidence of the effectiveness of halei.

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[1] Little, K.L. (1948b) p.127.

[2] But certain women are initiated into Pɔrɔ. cf. Little, K.L. (1967) p.245.

Apart from the general threat of sanctions controlled by halei, there was a yet more powerful and positive function; initiates were said to "die" in or on halei - ha halei ma.[1]

Initiation is thus the ceremonial announcing, and the event bringing about the aggregation of the individual to the group, protected and aided by halei which those already initiated, share. By initiation social adulthood is ascribed to the youth and the halei associated with Pɔrɔ is for the protection and benefit of those who have already reached this - partly achieved, partly ascribed - status, and share membership with the living and the dead who underwent the same initiation.[2]

Apart from halei as a general kind of power or authority provided by Ngewɔ and serving to bind members together and accentuate the line of distinction between participants and non-participants, Pɔrɔ also controls various specific examples of halei which are available to initiates and provides them with access to power otherwise beyond their achievement.

5-4.2 Pɔrɔ and spirits (ngafanga)

Central to Pɔrɔ are its spirits: central since they are frequently the focus of attention and always recognized, at least

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[1] We recorded that ha = to die: nde > le = to give birth. Ha-le(i) might appear to be a contracted form [death:birth], but it is not, and the collocation "ha halei ma" (to die, or be initiated on halei) tends to support the fact that halei of itself has nothing to do with death and birth: if it did, the first word, ha would be redundant.

[2] Little (1967, p.241,n.) gives Poe, "no end" as the Mende word for Pɔrɔ, which captures well the idea I am trying to develop here.

implicitly, as providing protection, power and sanctions. Pɔrɔ spirits guarantee the strength and continuity of the group of the living, acting as executors of the power of Ngewɔ. The spirits of the ancestors who were Pɔrɔ members and officials, are regarded as concerned with their heirs in Pɔrɔ. Reinhardt makes the point explicitly,[1] though she does not pursue the significance of this double base of authority, or contrast it with the authority-base of other Mende institutions. Our reason for doing so here is to be able later to consider the reception accorded by the Mende to the Catholic Mission, and determine the relationship between the latter and Pɔrɔ.

But there are further, non-ancestral spirits associated with Pɔrɔ.[2] The sacred, non-ancestral Pɔrɔ spirit, gbeni,[3] represented as a masked figure and described in Little,[4] is spoken of by my own Mende informants, as created by Ngewɔ. Gbeni, though "danced" by one of the local men, as the older initiates are well aware, is not naively confused with the person inside the costume, but seen as a sacred representation of the spirit with jurisdiction over all members, and quite different from other "dancing devils",

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[1] "Poro's (sic) authority ultimately rests on its access to the ancestral spirits of its hereditary officials, and on their control of powerful medicines, hale. (sic)." op.cit. p.6.

[2] For this and comparative data on other "Major Societies", the Paper by Reinhardt is the most comprehensive available (op.cit. 1973). I refer to it in the present text, only to summarize its main points and to show how Reinhardt's data support my analysis in its broad lines, which is what we consider here. But see also Little, K.L., (1967) pp.246-7.

[3] Reinhardt, L.R. op.cit., pp.7-8.

[4] Little, K.L. (1967) p.246: (1954) p.114, "The (Poro) ngafa was made by God and not by man."

in that it may only be seen by initiates and cannot be directly approached or addressed. It is in fact attended by an "interpreter", Wujei. Gbeni seems to be a palpable representation of the continuity of Pɔrɔ and a visible sign of the invisible participation of the spirits, and through them, Ngewɔ, in the affairs of Pɔrɔ.

The mysterious, sacred nature of Gbeni is impressed on the initiates in the following way: he is not restricted by the physical limitations by which mankind are bound. Gbeni is a spirit, sustained by Ngewɔ. Buvebla, hornblowers, are stationed in various parts of the forest quite near a town, and one blows his horn (whose noise is a representation of the founding father believed to have a speech impediment causing him to speak with great nasal resonance). The initiates follow the sound which suddenly booms out from a different direction, and the nearer they get, the farther away the sound becomes, as the buvebla in varied sequence play their instruments.

At the beginning of a Pɔrɔ session, and on the eve of its closure, the initiates and senior members and officials[1] pray and

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[1] Sowa is the name of one of these officials, and also the name of the third (and most powerful) of triplets. There may be some relationship between the hereditary power of twins or triplets, and the important power accredited to office holders in important institutions. One Sowa (def. sowɛi) may "own the medicines for a number of Pɔrɔ lodges if there are no triplets around", I was informed. And sowɛi (triplet) is born with powerful halei. This information was elicited in the context of work on multiple births, and the association with Pɔrɔ was made spontaneously by the informant. Sowa may well be a generic name for a society official of a certain rank, since in Sande, sowɛi appears.

sacrifice to former members, begging their favour. Formerly they offered schnapps or other spirit, and red rice (rice in palm-oil); now cheap rum is often used. On the final day a meal of red rice and a fowl is prepared and after part has been offered to the ngafanga, the new initiates share a common meal of the rest.

The secular ngafɛi (indef. ngafa) of Pɔrɔ, is Gɔbɔi: secular in the sense that it appears in public and may be approached, yet still much respected as an important spirit and often confused with Gbeni.[1] Though some problems of identification and explanation arise here, the point is nicely made that Gbeni-Gɔbɔi are distinct, with Gɔbɔi as perhaps the most important of the secular spirits of Pɔrɔ.[2]

We have briefly reviewed some of the good but incomplete literature on the subject of Pɔrɔ and ngafanga, in order to test my argument that spirits have a crucial role in these "Societies", and that apart from ancestral spirits there are important non-ancestral spirits (the same kind of distinction observed in Chapter Three relating to ngafanga in general).

By contrast with Pɔrɔ, the group ownership and control of halei within certain "Specialist Societies" (Chapter Four), did not at the same time reveal the presence and invocation of spirits specifically and exclusively concerned with those institutions; such spirits as were prayed to or given offerings, were ancestral spirits only, and were not represented in masks or public display.

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[1] Reinhardt, L.R. op.cit., pp.8-10.

[2] op.cit., pp.11-12, where other spirits, Falui, nafalie, Jobai, and Yavie, are mentioned.

5-5 SANDE (BUNDU)

Information in this section, though not comprehensive, is included since it helps make a point which is central to this thesis. In the most well-known "Society" for women, Sande, we discern an association of power (halei) and spirits (ngafanga), both of which are understood to be manifestations of the power of the Supreme Being, Ngewɔ, and both of which provide protection, opportunity, authority and sanction.

5-5.1 Sande and power (halei)

Sande halei is not limited to certain specific objects but, like Pɔrɔ halei can best be seen as a "deposit" of power in which initiates are permitted to share, and which includes specific objects (haleisia) impregnated with this power.

Prior to the final ceremonies of initiation, the candidates are washed (mua) or anointed (mali) with Sande halei as a sign of their new strength and of their incorporation. The masked spirits too, are anointed with halei,[1] an act which consecrates them, as it were, and sets them apart from purely secular use. Another kind of halei is believed to strike down or "fall on" men who are temerarious enough to spy on Sande proceedings, or who fail to stay indoors with eyes averted, when the announcement is made that the Sande women are coming into town. After the initiation ceremonies are completed, the women and new Sande-members parade through the town, while all

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[1] So indeed are many halei of the "fetish"-type, such as bɔfimɛi, ndili, etc. (q.v.)

the men remain indoors and do not look. On this occasion of rôle-reversal, the men explain their own behaviour by saying that among the women, who will be naked, are their own mothers and sisters. To see these women would be shameful (ngufengɔ) and smacks, however slightly, of simɔngama (unlawful sexual relations within prohibited relationships). The suspicion of simɔngama is feared probably as much as is the power of Sande halei itself, which is believed to cause bosin or swelling of the testes,[1] in the over-curious.

5.5.2 Sande and spirits (ngafanga)

More work undoubtedly remains to be done in this area[2] and my own enquiries are far from complete, but we can here contextualize Sande spirits within the broad framework of Mende belief and thought.

The sacred spirit is Sowei.[3] This is the same word used to refer to the leading officials of Sande, and also the word used for a woman official of Pɔrɔ. Moreover, the third born of triplets is called sowei. I cannot say for sure whether these are only homophones, or whether there is some element of synonymy, but it does not seem fanciful to suggest that sowei may have originally applied to that rarity, the third-born of triplets. Bearing in mind what was said above (pp.225ff) about the special powers and manifestation of spirit in multiple births, such a child may have been an obvious choice for certain official positions within "Societies" which relied

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[1] cf. p.252 supra. Hydroceles, which are quite common, are often attributed to Sande halei.

[2] But cf. Reinhardt, L.R. op.cit., pp.15-22.
Little, K.L. (1967), pp.226-7.

[3] Given by Reinhardt, L.R., op.cit., as Sowie.

heavily on halei and ngafanga. In the absence of real triplets, sowei may well have remained as a title designating the official chosen, or been applied to the tutelary ngafa of Sande.

The sacred spirit of Sande, like that of Pɔrɔ, cannot be approached directly by the populace, and needs an interpreter:[1] a clear attestation of its special or sacred character.

The Mende people are well aware of the distinction to be made between invoking ancestral spirits of the lineage or family, as a group of villagers or family members, and invoking or showing respect towards the spirits specifically associated with this or that "Society". They know there are various spirits with different authority over different groups, or over individuals as members of various groups. As one informant, questioned about respect for spirits, stated the distinction: "this [the object of our conversation], is Sande hinda, not just simply praying to spirits", suggesting that the spirits of the "Societies" must be seen in a different context from other spirits.

Halei and ngafanga are the defining characteristics of what have been called "Major Societies", and, I suggest, the legitimating forces of those institutions. Through the power and sanctions of halei and ngafanga, the group within their compass has

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[1] cf. Reinhardt, L.R., op.cit., p.18.

status and authority, is able to achieve continuity, and can define its boundaries, separating those within and those without, and controlling members while providing them with certain exclusive benefits.

Anyone who tries to interfere with these well-organized and socially approved groups, faces their laws and the effect of their halei and their ngafanga. And anyone wishing to change accepted practices must submit to the arbitrament of the leaders who uphold tradition. Thus, the leader of Sande, (or Pɔrɔ), in consultation with the local Chief, will prepare for a session of initiation, and once begun, Sande (or Pɔrɔ) rules have the force of law and may not be broached with impunity. If initiands are to be required for other work, the leaders must have been consulted and agree before the session starts, since isolation no less than physical initiation is required in order to prepare the candidate to gain the knowledge and dispositions necessary for an enhancement of the spiritual in their lives.

We will consider later, various points of conflict between the Catholic Mission and these Societies, when the force of the above point will become clear. And we will be able to discern tension between the authority arrogated by the Catholic Mission to itself, and that claimed by certain Mende institutions. A lack of resolution of conflicting claims produced a situation of mutual misapprehension and mistrust, and a lack of acceptance of the Catholic religion by Mende leaders who considered their authority to have been impugned. So long as the Church was not legitimated by or integrated with Mende social institutions and so long as those institutions remained strong, harmonious cooperation was impossible on the level envisaged by

missionaries - the level of conversion of belief and behaviour. Moreover, the Church was understood to be opposed to certain important Mende institutions whenever its missionaries inveighed against "superstition" and "ancestor worship" - which meant halei and ngafanga to the Mende. Official cooperation on the part of the Mende, could not be forthcoming until the Mende microcosm was broken down, and change was in the air in Mende country. And if the Mission was an agent of change but also seen as a threat to cherished Mende ways, then in the long term even when social change was widespread and gathering momentum, the Mission could easily appear as hostile to the Mende.[1]

But alternatively, Catholicism might be treated as irrelevant by Mende who preferred to rely on halei and ngafanga and their own understanding of the world whose edges the missionaries patrolled. The perquisites of European science and technology may be such as could be grafted on to the Mende stock without initially or obviously destroying it, and indeed, mere invitation by a Paramount Chief was no sure sign of the continued willingness of the people to cooperate with missionaries even on the level of education, much less on the level of religion; the Paramount Chief wielded no religious or sacred authority as such. The missionary would face a monumental problem of public relations and instruction in order to apprise the people of his intentions and modify their initial reactions and judgements.

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[1] cf. Chapters Seven to Nine, infra.

5-6 WITCHCRAFT

5-6.1 Introduction

In Chapters Three and Four, we considered both the social and the anti-social uses of halei and ngafanga respectively. It was first explained that halei itself was amoral and could be anti-socially applied. Ngafanga could be understood by considering those which were "social" in the sense of upholding social values, and those which were anti-social, in promoting individual self-interest over the good of the group.

In the present context, having seen the social relevance of halei and ngafanga within one and the same context, it remains to enquire whether in Mende life, we can discern the co-activity of selfish, anti-social ngafanga operating with halei which directly harms the group as a whole, or which illicitly promotes the ambition of individuals. Again, this is an extremely broad subject, and beyond the scope of the present work. Yet not only do we find a logical possibility for the accommodation of such phenomena, but a whole range of ethnographic data to exemplify that indeed the anti-social operation of halei and ngafanga is understood by the Mende to be a key article of belief. Such data must be surveyed here.

5-6.2 Witchcraft, spirit (ngafa), power (halei)

Some people who use halei for nefarious ends, may be called ndilemɔi if they are believed to use an object impregnated with halei, a ndilei.[1] Such are not really witches in Mende estimation, though the English term "witch" is often used in their regard.

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[1] cf. Chapter Four, p.210ff supra.

By contrast, twins and gbɛse are referred to as "witches" though the Mende make many qualifications when using this term. What then is a witch, in Mende belief?

The ndilemɔi, and indeed anyone who operates with halei for evil, (when that halei is understood as referring to objects or "fetishes" deliberately obtained to cause harm to others or unlawful benefit to oneself), may be more properly called a sorcerer or magician in the terminology of Evans-Pritchard[1] and Marwick.[2] The Zande distinction between witchcraft and medicine or magic, is mirrored in the Mende distinction between hɔnamɔi (witch power) and hale nyamumɔi (bad-'medicine'-person) or ndilemɔi (a person with a wicked "fetish" or ndilei). Evans-Pritchard's further observation that "it is highly improbable that an act of witchcraft ever takes place, whereas acts of magic [or sorcery] may be witnessed daily in the life of the Azande",[3] evokes strong echoes from the Mende context.

But we further distinguish in the Mende case between hɔnei, a witch spirit, (such as that possessed by twins), involuntary and not maleficent, and hɔnamɔi, witch power, always evil because voluntary and maleficent.

A twin is believed to possess a "witch spirit" hɔnei, and hence people must treat twins kindly lest they incur their displeasure and provoke the twin to direct his power to attack them. But the hɔnei is believed to be incorporeal and independent of a body, though operating through some personality. Some people do not realise that

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[1] Evans-Pritchard, E.E. (1931) pp.23-8.

[2] Marwick, M. (1964) pp.263-8.

[3] Evans-Pritchard, E.E., loc.cit., p.27.

they have been invaded by a hɔnei, and if accused by the presentation of circumstantial evidence, will be forced to confess and submit to the kɛmamɔi, a witch finder who will destroy the power of a witch. Or the person may, through a dream or by accident, discover he has a hɔnɛi and then entertain it. But once the hɔnɛi invades a person it is believed to take over that person's spirit, ngafɛi, and the result is a hɔnamɔi - an evil spirit with the special power of the hɔnɛi.

A case will illustrate this complex notion, provided by a Christian informant who was dying, apparently paralyzed, and who called the priest. After long hesitation he told the following story, which is reported here in its essentials.

> An unambitious man, he worked for but did not like, a farmer. One day while walking to his farm, he saw a group of witches. Now everyone knows that witches are invisible to all except other witches, and being afraid, the man tried to avoid them. They saw him as they were eating their meal of human flesh, and having caught him, forced him to eat. He ate but did not swallow, since he was revolted by the practice. He was then ordered to supply the next meal of human flesh, or to perish himself. In fear of his life he decided to kill his master the farmer, and approached his hut in the middle of the night. The farmer had protective halei - a witch net, kondo bomɛi,[1] to "catch" any witch trying to enter his house. Consequently the entry was prevented and the man caught in the net. He felt suspended over the threshold and was severely beaten. He was found lying, comatose, outside his employer's house, in the early morning, and immediately accused of witchcraft. He confessed finally, to the Chief and people. By afternoon he was paralyzed and appeared to be dying. The priest and people examined him cursorily but enough to determine that he seemed indeed to be paralyzed from the neck down. He was extremely agitated, and to calm him the priest spoke quietly with him, asking him about his life and the hard work of farming. He relaxed somewhat

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[1] One of a number of anti-witch devices, including the powerful witch-gun, fange, or kondo gbandɛi.

> and warmed to the task of showing just how difficult farming could be, when "brushing" (chopping down all the trees prior to burning, and planting the new rice). By way of example he said that only the previous week a tree had fallen on him - on the back of his neck, - and severely injured him, though he had thought he was getting better when this terrible indictment of witchcraft was hurled at him . . .

Prima facie it seems clear that he had sustained a broken neck, had a dream and perhaps become feverish and delirious, and events had quickly followed to provide an explanation of his state, that he himself accepted. Having been sprayed with an antidote by the Chief, his hɔnei was neutralized and he was treated for his sickness, while in the course of the proceedings several recent child deaths had been explained by reference to the alleged witch feast.

The young man concerned, became convinced, partly by his unaccountable physical condition, partly by the accusation of witchcraft, and partly no doubt by his admission of certain feelings of jealousy and hostility towards his employer, that he had been taken-over by a hɔnei to which he had succumbed when faced with the choice of killing or being killed.

Others are believed to seek to operate as witches and to join groups of witches that eat human flesh. And the witch has a whole range of halei to aid him, including the hɔna balui (witch aeroplane) and hɔna motui (witch motor-car). These rough effigies or models, may be thrown up into a tree, in the case of the hɔna balui, or secreted by the roadside, in the case of the hɔna mɔtui, and the hɔnei will "travel" on them when he leaves the host hɔnamɔi at night, so the people believe. It appears that there will always be some who

will make or acquire such objects if searching for influence or success, and their discovery and parading in public, confirms the populace in its belief in the reality of the invisible agents whose visible tools these are.

The people then, accept the invisible reality of witchcraft as partial explanation for the reality of child deaths and the existence of evil people. That is to say, they accept that evil ngafɛ̀ can and do operate with halei for destructive and selfish purposes. Circumstantial evidence to support this belief, is periodically discovered through witch-cleansing movements, and in ridding a community of the power of witches,[1] the witchfinder reinforces their belief in such agents. Witches and men who operate halei for evil, reverse all that the legitimate "Societies" uphold, and instead of upholding the community interests and integrating the individual into groups, promote selfish interests in direct conflict with those of the community. Witchcraft further provides explanations for sickness, death, as well as crop-failure, ill-luck and a whole range of problems which demand a solution in terms of personalistic explanations.

This section perhaps helps to contextualize missionary work in Mende country, which is as important to the thesis as an analysis of Mende belief and thought.

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[1] If the hɔnei is not exorcized it will become, after the death of the host, kanga fuaŋ - a spirit-bird which seeks another host. Hence the possibility that a person - intentioned or unsuspecting, may become host to a witch spirit, even though not born as one.

5-7 INTERMEDIARIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

5-7.1 Official Interpreters

We saw that twins and gbɛse can interpret certain events or advise people of how to act,[1] by virtue of their halei and their particular spirit or ngafɛi. Such people are born endowed with abilities beyond the scope of the average man or woman, and the successful gbɛse in a town or village will be approached by many people for advice and services. Though the ordinary people have direct access to halei and ngafanga in certain well-defined circumstances, there are occasions on which they need to be directed to a particular halei, or advised to perform a particular act of respect or sacrifice to particular ancestors.

There are many occasions during a person's lifetime when all is not well. Though not aware of any fault or omission on his own part, he might suffer frequent sickness, a run of bad luck, or a host of personal problems which time does not heal. He might be unpopular, or a nonentity in the village. In such circumstances there are still opportunities open to him, to find redress or explanation and satisfaction.

5-7.2 The Diviner (tɔtɔgbɛmɔi)

A tɔtɔgbɛmɔi is "one who foretells the future.[2] One such old man said that many years ago there were cannibals in the country. The big men would each pick a stone and give it to one bɛɛwunde[3] who

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[1] Twins are believed able to protect their house, its contents and occupants, up to the overhanging roof, from witches, and to safeguard the family farm - provided their instructions and wishes are carried out by the family.

[2] tɔtɔgbɛ = to search out, divine. bɛ > bɛlɛ = to examine, scrutinize: -mɔi = -person.

[3] examine-put-say: bɛɛ gɔtu = a stone used in divination; bɛɛ/bɛlɛ-gbɛmɔi = one who predicts by the use of stones.

took the stones to a special place and prayed over them and was able to discover which of their owners were cannibals. Kɛnyawunde was cited as the other founder of the diviners. Kɛnya was given as the esoteric name for dust or fine sand, and kɛnyawunde, by examining dust, was able to discover vital information.[1] The power of these diviners and those who were my own informants, was from Ngewɔ, so they explicitly claimed.

The power of divination is not necessarily inherited, though it tends to run in families. It is gained through a dream. One old man, a tɔtɔgbɛmɔi since 1910, said that initially he was sceptical of his father's power, but Ngewɔ showed him the reality. He dreamed that someone appeared to him and put stones or pebbles from a bag, on the ground. The apparition called him to watch the pebbles, and specified a person in the town who would die after two days. It happened. He told the dream to his father who warned him to keep quiet since he might be accused of causing the death [through witchcraft]. He used to practise with his father's pebbles, until the dream occurred again, and he was told to go to a place in the bush where he would find pebbles for his own use. This too happened, but as there were already three diviners in the town, he did not tell his father. The three were always arguing about diagnoses, so one day he publicly predicted what would happen, and he was proved right. The others were no longer patronized. Now though their power was from Ngewɔ, he said, they were careless and did not

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[1] Innes, G. (1969) p.44, gives "kɛnyɛ, sand spread on mat for use in divination. Kɛnyɛgbɛbla, diviners who use sand in their divination."

scrutinize the stones sufficiently and so missed vital clues. He knew the power was from Ngewɔ since it came through a dream, and dreams are means whereby Ngewɔ and ngafanga communicate with people.

There is no one to continue after he dies. People in rural areas, he said, patronize the tɔtɔgbɛmɔi more than in the past, but are afraid of the responsibility, and they have not had a dream. The sick, the ambitious - all come to him. If someone is sick in town, the Chief will make sure that he or one of his family consult the diviner.[1] There are five named stones indicating variously: a man; a woman; a favourable verdict; an unfavourable verdict; and a reprieve. The stones, about three dozen in all, are grouped in seven ranks on the mat on which the tɔtɔgbɛmɔi sits. He then interprets their significance, determining whether a man or a woman is involved, by word or action, and whether a matter of life and death is involved. The most important pebble is kaalii; if this lands on its own when thrown with others, it means a person will die.[2] Two throws are necessary: the first to identify the problem or a miscreant, and the second to determine what must be done.

I saw the pebble-play several times, and made extensive notes, but still am not sure what happens or how it is interpreted. But the people assume that it does need an interpretation, and rely on the tɔtɔgbɛmɔi. One thing which seemed particularly noteworthy was that the chances are three to one in favour of a woman being discovered as the cause of sickness or whatever problems are brought to the diviner.

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[1] cf. Chapter Six, p.289, infra.

[2] Statistically this is highly improbable, as is one particular pattern, which, if thrown twice in succession, means that a woman will die: if this pattern appears only once, as is more likely, it is interpreted to mean that a person is getting sick, but not that he or she will die.

Sacrifice of some kind, - determined by Ngewɔ and made manifest through the distribution of the pebbles, said the diviner - is prescribed to rectify the situation. Since there are many rules, and therefore many things which might have been done wrong, consciously or unconsciously, there are many explanations open to the diviner. The tɔtɔgbɛmɔi saw himself as an intermediary between Ngewɔ and the people, saving life and upholding traditional laws and norms. If his injunctions are carried out the "patient" will be safe, unless kaalii has indicated that death will follow, in which case, nothing can be done. The diviner can discover the cause of his own sickness too. Once, my informant said, he discovered he had unwittingly heard some Sande-business, so he paid a fine to the leader, and recovered.

Both men and women can be diviners if they have a dream, but in practice divining is more commonly done by men.

It is not difficult to appreciate the important place occupied by diviners in Mende life, as links between the people and halei or the spirits. When the individual is at a loss to remedy his situation, the diviner can help solve his problem and put him to rights with the world by uncovering the "real" source of sickness or misfortune, and persuading the client that his diagnosis is correct. He provides opportunity and explanation beyond the common touch, and reminds people of the danger of harbouring ill-feelings, concealing misdemeanours, or forgetting their duty.

5-7.3 Witchfinders: kɛmamɔi and kondobla

Like the tɔtɔgbɛmɔi, the kɛmamɔi (witch-finder) claims to have been given the power to search out and destroy certain manifestations of evil, especially the ndilei, and those who operate it.

The kondobla too are members of a group, who claim the power to "see" the normally invisible witch itself, hɔnɛi. The kɛmamɔi is extremely important in Mende country at the present time, and warrants far more space than can be given here. He is one who, through a dream, claims to have received a mirror, mɛmɛi, certain leaves, and the power to detect ndilebla. He thus claims special halei which he uses to liberate a community from the scourge of witchcraft, the main cause of child deaths. He is invited into a Chiefdom by a Paramount Chief (and between them, they derive substantial financial rewards from the people), and goes to every village in a Chiefdom in turn. It seems that a Chiefdom will be revisited after twelve or fifteen years, and this itself is significant.

The kɛmamɔi declares an amnesty for all who willingly surrender any suspect or bad halei they may possess, and then searches for ndilei, "discovering" perhaps half a dozen in the houses of old or lonely people, men and women. Having extracted a confession, imposed a fine, and humiliated the bemused defendants, he declares the town "clean" and gives a set of rules to be observed by the people, including the obligation of supporting the now dispossessed ndilei-people. To general rejoicing, he leaves the town, and the people are ready to face the routine of daily life with more equanimity than before. Consequently, babies will be better looked after than when they seemed always to be getting sick and dying because of witches, and the people will be predisposed to seek other explanations for those neo-natal deaths which do occur. Probably the infant mortality rate actually drops after the catharsis of a witch-cleansing

procedure; certainly the people believe that witches are no longer abroad. After some years, when the novelty of the witch-finder's work has worn thin, people begin again to wonder whether there is a recrudescence of witchcraft in the village. If several children die, the word "witchcraft" may be mooted, but circumspectly, and once the people believe that witches are attacking their babies' spirits, they seem less able or willing to cope with infant morbidity. Consequently more children die, the conviction of witchcraft is reinforced, and the Chief is begged for, or suggests, the ministrations of kɛmamɔi. One can estimate that the cycle takes about a dozen years, which seems to coincide with the frequency of the visits of the kɛmamɔi. With only a handful of kɛmamɔi in the country and thousands of Mende villages, he has no lack of invitations and no lack of money, if he can continue to convince the people of his power to discover ndilei hidden deep in the ground or tucked away in secret places.

To say that the kɛmamɔi himself "plants" then "discovers" these objects, is to rationalize and belittle an important phenomenon. Even if the kɛmamɔi admitted, or the people proved, that they had been "planted", the explanation that kɛmamɔi had power from Ngewɔ and his success depended on his ingenuity and panache as much as his power, would be convincing to people who witness confessions and the tour de force of a witch-finding session.

Where witches are able to be invisible and where mere man is powerless to accuse since the putative witch is believed able to attack him even before he can formulate his accusation, the reality and accessibility of the kɛmamɔi gives the Mende hope and persuades

him that the world is not completely chaotic and uncontrollable. Kɛmamɔi is an important mediator, who uses the situation with expertise, persuading the people that if even one in the town is hostile or sceptical, he may well be faced with a rigorous questioning, search, and possible demasking. Conformity is usually secured very quickly.

The kondobla claim power to see witches and to be able to share this power with others. A man afraid of possible witchcraft against him, may obtain halei from the kondo-people, in the form of a preparation of burned leaves filling a large snail-shell. This is hung over the doorway as protection, and after ceremonies in which some liquid is put in the eyes, the subject is apparently considered able to see witch people (hɔnabla). Anyone can join and obtain this favour for money, and enjoys the fellowship of co-members. One man, accused of murder by witchcraft, and the use of hale nyamui ("bad" halei), was fined £57.[1] He was a member of the kondobla and the other members paid £5 each and a bushel of rice, to realize the money. He said he had been left certain halei by one or two old men, and though he maintained that he did not try to use the halei, since they were not his own, the Chiefdom Police discovered them in the course of investigations into the murder, and said they were bad-halei. He maintained his innocence, but added that being a member of the kondobla was his salvation because otherwise he would have been ostracized for failure to pay the fine.

To become a member of the kondo people as well as to join any group, can be seen as a form of long-term insurance for the

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[1] Which, some twenty years ago, when it happened, was far beyond the means of the vast majority of rural Mende people.

individual. Few rural Mende people would refuse outright to take advantage of this protection and insurance, and as long as people were attracted to such groups, so long would they survive.

5-7.4 Dreams and dreamers

Apart from a range of officially recognized intermediaries between mankind and the operation of the power and spirits under the control of Ngewɔ, some individuals, or many individuals at certain times, receive special enlightenment or direction for themselves or on behalf of others.

It is important to mention the relevance of dreams here, in order to produce a paradigm of Mende belief and thought about Ngewɔ and the world. We noted that dreams are understood to be one way in which Ngewɔ and ngafanga transmit their orders to men. As such, they are taken very seriously, and a person who dreams of something related to the safety of the village, will report it to the Chief who, with the help of the diviner if necessary, will carry out, to the letter, the instructions given in the dream. Indirectly at least, the "dreamer" receives attention and recognition in the community. People respect and even fear him. Everyone knows that a dream must be reported if it relates to the common good. A young schoolboy who dreamed that the town would be destroyed by fire, reported his dream to the authorities and named several people "shown" in his dream, including the head-teacher of the local school. At the schoolboy's bidding, the Chief, headteacher and other worthies, were obliged to make sacrifices of small things such as a needle, a button

or a piece of shirting. Refusal to do so, would have been interpreted as bad will; acquiescence - at least by the teacher - made him feel rather foolish. And the boy received celebrity status for a few days.

Should a person claim to have dreams quite frequently, and should he be capable of attracting the attention of an audience, he may well become known and respected as a prophet - of whom there are a number in Mende country. Those I knew tended to be Muslims, but the most well known had been educated and baptized as a Catholic, become a Muslim in early manhood, and, having become a prophet, maintained a very ecumenical stance, attracting both nominal Christians and nominal Muslims and appealing successfully to his dreams as support for his assertions and injunctions.

He maintained that in his dream his spirit (ngafei), had been transported out of his body to heaven, where God[1] told him to vomit up all his wickedness, and reform. He received power and instructions from God, and began to preach to the people. The instructions were simple, his fee modest, and his fame and riches grew rapidly with his cosy moralizing and appeal that the people should leave their wrongdoings, not destroy any [human] life, not lie or quarrel, marry according to the instructions they received but only give 40 cents and four kola-nuts in brideprice, take up to four wives, and divorce if opportune. He said God had instructed him not to work with his hands, and from being a semi-literate ex-illicit-diamond miner, he now "gave the message" to the people, and received unsolicited gifts and requests for prayers in return.

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[1] "God" was the word used by this semi-literate Mende with both Christian and Muslim pedigree.

The illiterate Mende people accepted him and found him relevant to their situation and saw him as a bona fide agent of Ngewɔ.[1]

The Mende system of belief and understanding provides opportunities for leadership and new status for those who can claim power or enlightenment by dream experiences, and the Mende are aware of examples of very ordinary people who have found opportunities of these kinds. With a large number of social groups which provide power or access to the spirits, and the importance attached to dreams as channels of communication with Ngewɔ, it is perhaps not surprising that no great proliferation of Independent Churches has taken place in Sierra Leone. And if, apart from sources of opportunity and advancement, available through traditional means, one looks for possible sources of opportunity provided by the presence of the missionaries, it appears that both traditional Mende and Christian Mende can achieve sufficient status, leadership, and influence, to satisfy them. When the Mende microcosm begins to break down more rapidly - especially after the Second World War, and when education and the opportunities which derive from it, becomes more widespread, then perhaps Mende people will become more frustrated and driven by unfulfilled ambition, and more likely to look beyond both traditional structures and Christianity, for satisfaction. In other words,

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[1] In mission Journals throughout the period under review, the appearance of "prophets" has been periodically noted, usually with disapproval or mild amusement.

when neither the old beliefs nor the Catholic religion satisfy the aspirations of the rising generations of Mende, one might expect Independent religious and quasi-religious movements to flourish. Perhaps such a situation is close to realization in the Sierra Leone of the mid-nineteen-seventies.[1]

So far, we have looked at the opportunities available to Mende people within the traditional framework of belief. The present chapter has had to be more tentative and cursory than the previous two chapters, because of the vast amount of ethnographic data involved and both the lack of available space and my own incomplete research. More research certainly remains to be done, yet we have suggested enough for us to be able to complete the overall scheme undertaken in Chapter Three. This now appears as fig. 15.

Some explanation of the figure, may help here. In the world of creation, effectively distinct from the abode of Ngewɔ in Mende thought, is to be found the mass of mankind. Since mankind relies on the creative and sustaining power of Ngewɔ, he makes use of a variety of means and institutions, provided by Ngewɔ for his benefit. In the world too, is evil - evil power and evil spirits. Man may succumb to evil, but not without a fight, since he has a variety of options and means whereby he can improve his chances of survival and success.

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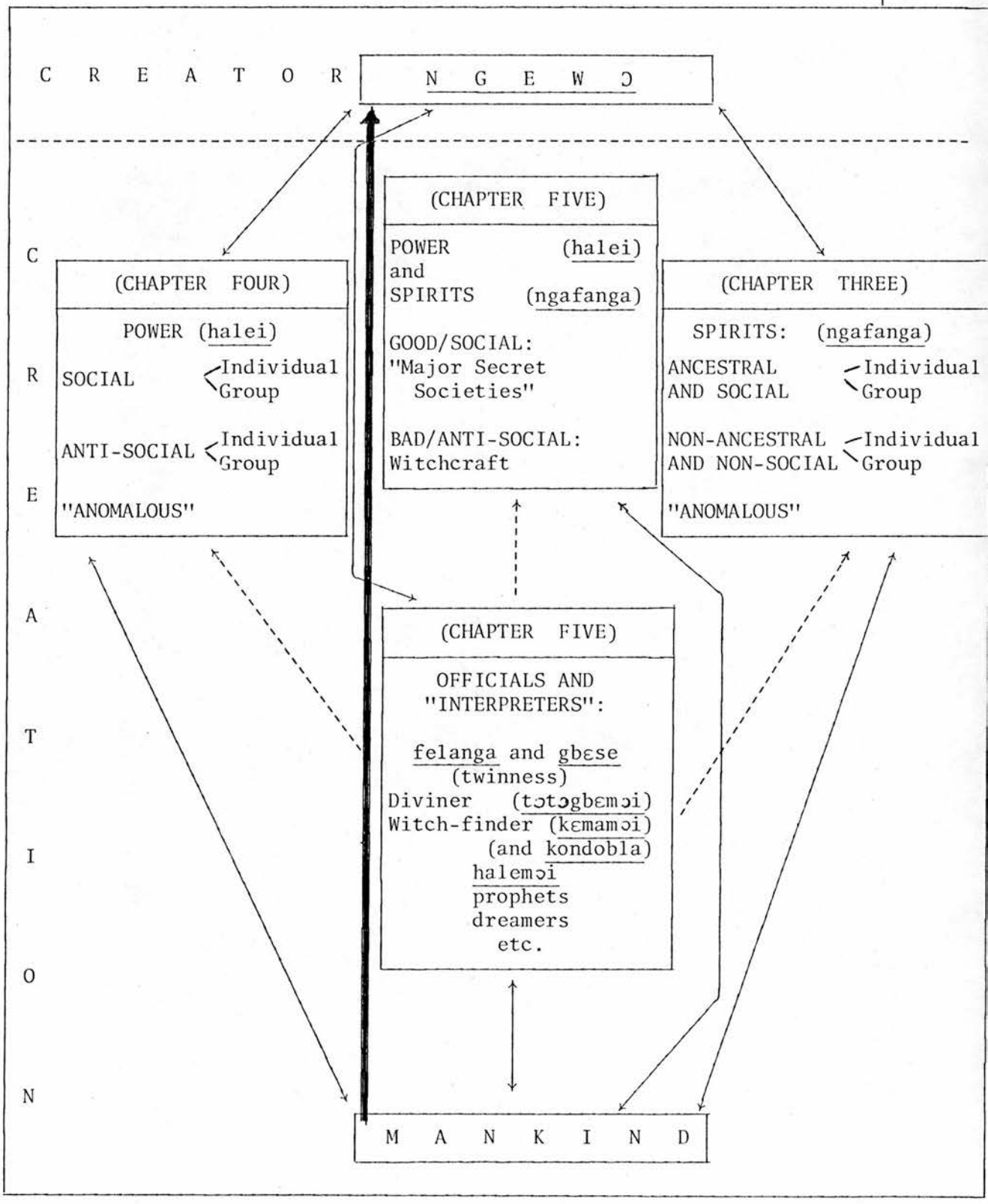
[1] cf. Peel, J.D.Y. (1968) pp.4-6.

PROCESSES OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CREATOR (NGEWƆ) AND MANKIND

FIG. 15



one way process

two way process

process of referral

Between man and Ngewɔ (bold line) there is only direct communication in extreme cases; man seeks the help of the Creator when all else fails. But the power (halei) of Ngewɔ is institutionalized for the benefit of man, and controlled and dispensed in a variety of ways. Through halei then, man may participate in what is essentially the power of Ngewɔ, though he may use it for selfish and anti-social purposes too. Spirits (ngafanga) likewise, are maintained in existence by Ngewɔ, so Mende believe, and given delegated powers and authority over mankind. Through ngafanga therefore, man can experience the power of Ngewɔ, though he may risk illicit access and commerce with spirits if he dare.

A combination of halei and the authority of ngafanga is found in certain institutions known as "Major Secret Societies" in the literature, and these are inclusive of all men, all women, or all mankind and provide a sense of identity, moral unity, and certain benefits complementary to those enjoyed by other analogous institutions.

Man is not always the best judge in his own case, and there exist in Mende society, other institutionalized positions or authority-holders to whom an individual or group may appeal for advice and direction in certain circumstances. Such include felanga and gbɛse (associated with twinness), the dealer in halei (halemɔi), the diviner (tɔtɔgbɛmɔi), the witchfinder (kɛmamɔi), and undoubtedly others, including prophets.[1] And finally the individual may be instrumental in communicating the wishes of Ngewɔ to the people, since dreams are

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[1] Though Prophets are most commonly Muslim, they have managed to adapt well to Mende expectations, preach a diluted form of Islam, and claim power from Ngewɔ.

manifestations of such communication. Even if a given individual is not enlightened by a dream, he can approach one of the "interpreters" when in sickness or perplexity. All these - halei, ngafanga, "Secret Societies" and "interpreters" - are then, aids to man in his way through life, and constitute for him a range of opportunities, responsibilities and sanctions. He may not visualise the whole system, but in a given situation knows or will discover that part of the overall scheme (formalized in fig. 15), relevant to his predicament. All of life's vicissitudes can theoretically be related to and solved by one or other of these institutions. It is a total system; to repudiate part is tantamount to undermining the whole.

In subsequent chapters, we consider how the Mende reacted to the Christian message, and what effect Christian doctrine and morals had on his view of his indigenous understanding of the world; and we consider too, in the light of the scheme proposed here, what challenges Christianity posed for "traditional" Mende belief, and where the evangelical, proselytizing assault was most felt.